

**GOING THE DISTANCE: A DESCRIPTION OF COMMUTER COUPLES IN JOS, NIGERIA**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for  
the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

in the subject

**Sociology**

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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(JANUARY 2018)

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## DECLARATION

I declare that **“Going the distance: a description of commuter couples in Jos, Nigeria”** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



JANUARY 2018

(Signature & Date)

## **DEDICATION**

To Commuter Couples around the world, committed to building Strong Families.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

As I come to the end of this study, three things stand out: First, with God, all things are possible; second, the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step and, third, it takes a village to raise a child. With these truths in mind, I would like to acknowledge all those who supported me through obtaining this doctoral degree.

My highest thanks, praise and glory belong to God, who began a good work and faithfully completed it, not by my might nor my intellect but by His Good Spirit, who taught me and strengthened me through this research. Father, I am grateful.

To my supervisor, Prof. M.E. Rabe, I would like to say a very big thank you, for her patience, inspiration and support throughout the period of this study. Not only did she offer valuable academic comments and observations, she also saw to my further learning by encouraging me to attend conferences in South Africa and Vienna. Thank you Prof.

I would also like to thank the couples who took part in this study, and shared their stories and experiences on being in a commuter marriage, in order to extend the boarders of knowledge on this subject matter. Without your contribution, this study would not have been done.

I'm grateful to all my lecturers and colleagues at the university of Jos, Nigeria and especially the sociology department where I learned the theory and rudiments of this great discipline. I also thank Dr. K. Korb for giving me a feel of what good research is all about and for her friendship. Thank you to Dr. & Prof. Ugbabe for the great lunches and stimulating discussions. I also thank Dr. C. Agboola, a colleague turned friend, from UNISA who helped me find my way on a journey, I had never been. Thanks sis.

I lost some treasured people during the course of my studies; Prof. Ibanga who tutored me and made me laugh in demography and statistics, and Juliet Offodile, my friend, with whom we started this journey. I am grateful for the memories.

To my Pastors (Rev.& Mrs. Kanos), and my church families (The Parliament, Jos and Holy Trinity Lagos), I say thank you for the love and refreshing. Thank you, Rev. Kanos, for teaching me that NO is not an option; that we must extend the Kingdom of God where our feet tread and that we prevail through prayers. Your teachings stayed with me through my studies.

I want to say a big thank you to my friends: Maureen Nnamonu, the Amazing Mums and GHOST Gals; those WhatsApp chats, prayer meetings and the delicious food, did more than you can ever know during the times I didn't know how to navigate any further.

I also want to thank my wonderful and supportive extended family; my mothers: Mama Kumswa and Mrs Rimdams; my siblings: Nanmah & Chris Ngwodo, Domman Rimdams, Pirmah & Bamsen Rimdams, together with my nieces and nephews, who in no small measure, supported me, encouraged me and celebrated each milestone in the course of this study. Words are not enough to express my gratitude.

To my children Paul and Michelle, who have been so eager to hear that the Ph.D. is complete, thanks guys, for your patience and understanding especially during the times I had to be away at school or at a conference; and when I had to study and couldn't give you my full attention.

To my husband, and one who truly deserves this degree, Mr Nanfa Kumswa, I say a million thank yous and I know it still doesn't say enough. Thanks for your unquantifiable love and support, and for the push from start to finish. Thanks sweetie, we've only just begun.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CAC	Corporate Affairs Commission
FAAN	Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Commission
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
NAPEP	National Poverty Eradication Programme
NYSC	National Youth Service Corps
PHCN	Power Holding Company of Nigeria
RSVP	Répondez s'il vous plaît meaning "Please respond".
SMS	Short Message Service
UNISA	Universtiy of South Africa

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis describes a family variation among urban Nigerian couples called a commuter marriage. A commuter marriage in this study is defined as a union between a dual earner/dual career couple where the husband and wife have decided to live apart from each other due to work commitments until such a time as is convenient for them to live continuously together again. This separation is mainly undertaken to improve their financial and career prospects. The study seeks to understand what dynamics are involved in a commuter marriage in Jos, Plateau State. The Life Course Perspective, with a focus on the gendered life course perspective, serves as a theoretical framework for this study. The perspective assumes that families undergoing the same transitions are likely to display the same characteristics which may not be necessarily relevant for all families in the same life stage, while the gendered life course perspective acknowledges the gendered context. At the same time the cultural context of the Nigerian society in terms of family norms are taken into account. An overview of commuter marriages, including characteristics of commuter marriages and non-traditional marriages linked to commuter marriages are provided. The differences between established and adjusting couples were repeatedly underlined. The research has an underlying interpretivist paradigm, therefore a qualitative research methodology was deemed best for the study. A semi-structured interview guide and time diaries were used to obtain data from seventeen participants. It was found that a commuter marriage is costly financially, socially and emotionally. An emphasis on the male provider and the wife as the manager of the resources was highlighted. Commuter couples report that their greatest support system constitute their family members who show the most understanding to their situation. Commuter fathers were generally passionate about their fatherly roles, but had conflicting feelings about balancing work and family, feeling the family is losing out. Generally, commuter couples in this study showed a sincere desire for the commuting relationship not to span an indefinite amount of time.

**Keywords:** African families; commuter marriage; dual earner couples; gendered life course; life course theory; Jos, Nigeria; non-traditional marriage; primary home of residence; qualitative methodology, time diaries.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides details of the research, describing the coping strategies of commuter couples in Jos, Nigeria, including the study background, the statement of the research problem, the research questions and objectives, and the rationale of the study as well as an outline of the chapters. Furthermore, the chapter contains a broad introduction to the research, some elements of the methodological approach as well as the ethical considerations.

### **1.2 Background to the Study**

Over the past fifty years, starting in post-colonial Nigeria in the 1960s, urban families have undergone a metamorphosis (George & Ukpong 2013). Families have largely evolved from the polygynous form, in which one man would be married to more than one wife, living with their children as an extended family, to the nuclear family, which consists of a father, a mother and children living together on a daily basis. In addition to this, nuclear families were and in most cases still are, home to other relatives who come from the village, sometimes on a short-term basis, to find work, pursue education and to help with household chores. The father of the house usually works outside the home during daytime and return in the evenings. With time, women also entered the job market ushering in the dual-earner couple, often relying on domestic services as both parents are employed outside the home. Some work situations demanded that spouses be transferred to work posts away from their homes, while some couples who could not be employed in their hometowns had to look elsewhere for a job. This brought about the decision to move the entire family or engage in a commuter marriage. The latter entails leaving the other family members at the primary home base until such a time when the spouse who moves is settled. Settled refers to aspects such as obtaining suitable accommodation for the family, finding schools for the children and other factors that have to be considered when making such a move, implying that commuter marriages are usually considered to be temporary (Otite 1991; Heaton & Hirschl 1999; Tade & Aderinto 2011; George & Ukpong 2013).

The concept of husbands living apart from their families for certain amounts of time is not necessarily new to the Nigerian family. In time past separations existed in various forms and

under different economic circumstances, for example, men engaged in migrant labour as tin miners, rail construction workers and farmers. Nnaemaka (2006) refers to families being apart for periods of time to engage in educational pursuits and work demands within and outside the country and Akanle, Adebayo & Busari(2014) mention families being apart for short or long periods to meet work demands, for pilgrimage and for business.

During the colonial period, living apart from their families was not unusual for men, especially when they were civil servants and had to be transferred to posts outside their homes. When these transfers occurred, the man's family, maybe moved to be closer to him while he worked, or the family may remain where they were originally (Otite 1991; Lindsay 1999; Korieh 2010)

Scholars, such as Winkler (1998) and Casper & Bianchi (2002), have alluded to the fact that dual-earner couples commute to enhance their socio-economic status as a family. The pursuit of economic gain, educational goals and professional satisfaction seem to be the chief motivations for a spouse to accept a job far from the home where the family resides. Since the 1960's, trends in Nigeria seem to show that more families have engaged in a commuter lifestyle by taking up jobs in a different location from where their families reside. Such jobs include bank positions, public service jobs and running owned businesses, just to mention a few opportunities, in locations where the resources and raw materials for such businesses are perceived to be more available. These movements and relocations vary from short to long term periods, although there is not much supporting evidence in Nigerian literature discussing commuter marriages specifically, although migrant labour has long been studied on the African continent.

Despite the above realities regarding various forms of commuting, Gerstel & Gross and (1984) Furstenberg & Cherlin (1991) indicate that cultural norms and values within certain societies entail that a family- especially a husband and a wife- ought to continuously live together in the same location and seldom be apart. Studies from the West, suggest that dual-earner marriages, and commuter marriages, are considered non-conventional forms of marriage by virtue of the fact that these family forms are not operating according to the societal expectations of the traditional couple. Especially after the Second World War, the nuclear family living together with the husband as the worker and breadwinner, and the wife staying at home to cook, clean and mind the children became the normative family form in many Western countries. Commuter



marriages are thus viewed as an exception to the norm (Gerstel & Gross 1984; Winfield 1985; Jackson, Brown, & Patterson-Stewart 2000; Rhodes 2002, Lindemann 2017).

Some Nigerian scholars such as Enabulele (1991); Otite (1991); Teboh (1994) and Nwosu (1999), have pointed out that Nigerian women have often been engaged in some trade and did not only take care of children at home. It was, and is still, common to find women selling homemade articles, such as food, soap or beadwork, owning a stall in the market, engaging in farming activities on own or farmland that caters either for the home only or for selling as well. In other words, women did not only rear children, cook and clean, but also earned an income and yielded produce. This may account for why dual earner marriages are not perceived as an exception or unconventional in Nigeria. It is expected that Nigerian women / wives should be doing something in an economic sense to earn an income or to contribute to the household resources, as Enabulele (1991) alludes that Nigerian women are frequently combining motherhood, employment and childrearing. It is a cultural expectation that a woman does not just sit idle, she must be industrious, doing something with her hands as a way of contributing to her home, but in her contribution, she should not outshine her husband who is seen as the primary provider. Almost two decades ago, the “modern Nigerian woman” was already described by Nwosu (1999) as sophisticated and different from her rural counterpart in that she does not engage in backbreaking chores, but has domestic worker(s), often from a rural area, who is able to take care of house chores so she can concentrate on her job and economic activities. It is commonly accepted that husbands and wives work outside the home provided they both come back home and the wife’s job is not so demanding that it seems she has neglected her home.

Some literature seems to suggest that when a couple embarks on a commuter marriage, it is because the couple have decided that both careers they are involved in are important (Rotimi 2005) and usually it is the man who moves away from the original (primary) home (Anderson 1992; Van der Klis & Mulder 2008). Although Jackson et al (2000) suggest that commuting is a female determined arrangement due to the fact that women are establishing their careers and are not so likely to move to the husband’s place of work. In some cases, especially in Nigeria, wives may own business such as buying and selling of merchandise and dealing in agricultural produce.

Currently, women in Nigeria are making a significant socioeconomic impact, but the society is still male dominated and as such, the contributions of these women compared to their husbands are considered inconsequential in many areas. Observations in recent years, indicate that in Nigerian families, women are increasingly sharing the breadwinning role with men in addition to taking care of the children, cooking and cleaning. The additional income also helps the couple to respond to the needs of extended family members who may or may not be living with them (Fadeyomi 1991; Rotimi 2005; Epie 2010; Nnoyelu & Anigbogu 2013). Women contributing to the household income, working at home and catering to the children have been described as doing a 'second shift' (Hochschild & Machung 2012), carrying a 'triple workload' (Nwabara 1989), being 'cake winners' instead of 'breadwinners' (Winfield 1985) and being overworked (Raza 1989) and Fapohunda (2012) postulates that women carry an unequal division of unpaid domestic work. Anderson (1992) opines that due to increase in industrialization, more women in the labour force and increase in dual earner and dual career couples, the commuter lifestyle will be on the increase.

### **1.3 Statement of Research Problem**

This research intends to describe and explore how commuter families cope in Jos, Nigeria. This investigation will gain insight into the concept of commuter marriages in Jos, while also providing data for comparative family studies in other environments and societies.

Although migrating families share similar experiences with contemporary commuter marriage families they have different characteristics (see chapter 3 section 3.2.2). West African families in pre-colonial and colonial times did not always live continuously together in the same household due to various work-related reasons, chief among them being labour migration. These migrations are many times dominated by men, leaving home for long periods of time to engage in seasonal jobs such as farming and fishing or long-term projects such as railway construction or mining (Adepoju 2005).

More recently migration occurred in other parts of the continent and the world due to harsh political environments and overbearing socio-economic conditions, including lack of jobs and employment, not enough resources to start own business and poor quality of education (Adepoju 2005; de Hass 2006). Members of the family who migrate usually send money back to the family they left behind and pay for resources for the family's upkeep from the destination point

(Schrieder & Knerr 2000). Many families that have been affected by migration find that family members have to cope in diverse ways with the absence of the migrating family member (Dillon, Mueller, & Salau, 2011). However, contemporary urban families in Nigeria are often characterised by a dual earner marriage where both parents work outside the home in order to make a living and provide food on the table (Fadayomi 1991; Akanle et al 2014). These jobs that couples are engaged in are diverse, ranging from being employed in the public or private sector to being self-employed or a combination of any of the above. Being committed to a job may mean that one of the spouses may have to leave the homestead in order to fulfil job expectations. This results in what is termed a commuter marriage.

Anderson & Spruill (1993) seem to suggest that many couples in commuter marriages decide that the wife and children stay in the primary home while the husband commutes. The husband usually comes home every weekend, fortnightly, monthly or even after a longer time interval.

As mentioned, families operating a commuter marriage are usually seen as not adhering to the normative values and expectations of family members and friends as many believe that families, especially husbands and wives, ought to live together. Husbands and wives are expected to share companionship, raise children together and instill in them values and norms that are compatible with the broader society. It is assumed that this will keep the sanctity and principles of marriage so that one spouse that does start an extramarital affair or that one or both spouses do not feel that they are being neglected. Division of labour over centuries was gender specific according to societal role expectations and has changed much in recent years. These roles usually revolve around expected roles of the father/husband and mother/wife as it concerns child rearing and economic provision for the family. For example, in many dual earner Nigerian homes, division of labour is gender specified especially when it comes to sharing economic tasks of the home such as husbands pay the house rent and wives buy foodstuff (Rotimi 2005). Nwosuji (2008) also suggests that the pressure of running a dual earner home may be felt more by the wife as she fulfils her role as employee and societal expectations of being a good wife and a mother with duties such as cooking, cleaning and generally running the home front. This could lead to stress, decision-making challenges, childrearing concerns, anxieties over the safety of the family, the functioning of the marriage and a whole lot of other issues.

Commuter marriage being one of the non-traditional forms of marriage has specific dimensions that should be explored. Some of these include how the commuter aspects affect the marriage relationship, childcare arrangements, public perceptions of the commuting couple as well as the perceived advantages and drawbacks the commuting couple view regarding their kind of marriage, and also the coping strategies of the spouses in their different roles, places of work and residences. Coping mechanisms can be understood as problem solving strategies that are used to respond to stressors and situations which encompass the continuous, progressive, dynamic and protective processes that facilitate how human beings adapt to the constant changes in their lives and environment. (Drapeau, Blake, Dobson, & Körner 2017; Abarghouei, Sorbi, Abarghouei & Reza 2017).

Perceptions uncovered in the literature allude to the fact that a commuting relationship has various impacts on the marriage relationship, especially when it comes to communication, finances, decision making and child rearing (Glotzer & Federlein 2007; Lee 2015). Glenn (2005) and Weisser (2006) opine that making a commuter marriage work, requires a lot of time and money. Data properly collected and analysed on this subject, could add to the body of existing literature on urban contemporary African families.

A commuter marriage in this study is defined as a union between a dual earner/dual career couple where the husband and wife have decided to live apart from each other due to work and family commitments until such a time as is convenient for them to live continuously together again. This separation is undertaken to improve their financial and career prospects. One spouse, usually the husband, lives and works in a separate city or town known as the *secondary home* apart from his family and comes regularly, to the *primary home*, the established place of residence where his wife and children reside (see Rhodes 2002; Ralph 2015). The secondary home of residence is where the partner will sleep at least four consecutive nights per week away from the primary home, but return to the primary home not less than once every three months.

Based on the above, the research seeks to find answers to the following question:

- What social dynamics are involved in commuter marriages in Jos, Plateau State?

To answer this, the following subsidiary questions are raised:

- a. How does commuting affect couples in a commuter marriage?

- b. What are the coping strategies employed by commuting couples in Jos?
- c. How can couples engaged in commuter marriages be supported?

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Determine how the commute affects the marital relationship of the couple.
2. Explore the coping strategies employed by commuting couples when they are apart.
3. Publish findings that may be beneficial to commuter couples in Nigeria and across the world.

#### **1.5 Rationale for the Study**

This study is deemed significant and relevant in the study of African families at this time due to certain considerations. The most pertinent reason for embarking on this study is the dearth of relevant literature on African contemporary families, especially Nigerian families. This research builds largely on previous research undertaken outside the geographical location of this proposed study, but with the aim to critically analyse how it fits (or not fit) the local context. After engaging with literature from the West and finding a gap in African literature, this study aims to try and fill in the gap pertaining specifically to Nigeria.

A second consideration is based on my personal observation of commuter couples in Jos, Plateau state, Nigeria. In the housing estate of where I reside, in 2011 it occurred to me that all of the wives and one husband were at home with the children for varying degrees of time from weekdays to three weeks or even longer because their spouses were employed in another state. I observed this trend in more detail and found that in various groups I am involved in, such as where I work at the University of Jos and the church I go to, there are cases of people engaged in a commuter marriage. In addition, my neighbours also mentioned they have friends and colleagues who are involved in commuter marriages.

One of the many prides of the sociological discipline is its ability to engage in real life situations and people who can share their thoughts and feelings. These can be correctly interpreted to bring about meaning, fulfilment, filling gaps and providing answers to the issues at hand. This research hopes to be more than an academic engagement where it can make use of the tenets of sociology

to provide a solid framework that could bring an accurate interpretation, leading to a positive difference to family life in Nigeria, even if only in the aspect of dual earner / commuter families.

### **1.6 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

In this research the Family Life Course Perspective will be used as the major theoretical framework. The life course perspective has been discussed by various scholars and will be explored in detail in chapter three. The major construct of the Life Course Approach is first and foremost its concern with individuals in families through their lifetime within a particular social context, observing that these families may go through transitions, stages or events that are focused in time and space. Elder (1994, 1998) describes the life course perspective as both a theory and a method that alerts us to the real world. The life course theory is considered apt as the study focuses on interaction between variables or events- work and family- and the causes and effects of these interactions.

Casper & Bianci (2002) are of the view that the study of transitions from one stage or event are vital in the contemporary study of the life course, stating that key events in the transition process include work and family decisions. A gendered life course perspective (Moen 2001) is employed in the research to view these transitions as the gender roles each spouse plays are instrumental to their social relations over the life course especially in terms of the cultural context they find themselves in.

### **1.7 Research Methodology**

The nature of the research is qualitative, making use of semi structured interview guides and time diaries to collect data. Participants for this study were selected because they engage in a commuter marriage in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria, that is, either a husband or a wife whose partner works or is pursuing any other form of socio-economic activity in another Local Government Area or State in Nigeria outside of Jos. The primary home of residence for participants is Jos and the partner will sleep at least four consecutive nights per week away from the primary home, but return to the primary home not less than once every three months. Seventeen people participated in this study and data was analysed using a thematic analysis in which field transcripts were first coded and then grouped into themes. The themes formed the guide into which the chapters in this thesis are discussed.

## **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

In accordance with the UNISA (2013) code for research ethics, the participants volunteered freely to participate in the research and were free to withdraw at any point if they are no longer comfortable in a participating in the research. Before the interviews began, participants read through a consent form which explained the conditions above and also noted that there will be no financial compensation to participate in the research. The consent form also informed participants that no part of the research will cause them physical, mental or emotional harm. In addition to this, anonymity was guaranteed. Informed consent forms were signed by each participant after they have been fully informed of what the research is about and their part in the study (see Appendix 3).

In agreement with the University of South Africa's policy for ethical research, I adapted the following as guidelines for ethical considerations in this research:

1. I will seek to be professionally competent in this research, consulting and networking with other professionals in my field to make this research distinguished.
2. I will seek to be fair and honest in my delivery of research findings, making sure not to make the public cast doubt on the integrity of the sociological discipline.
3. In conducting this study, I will seek to respect and acknowledge the rights of participants in this study, not discriminating based on gender, religion or values that they hold.
4. I will seek to uphold my social responsibility by making sure that information concerning this research is properly disseminated, i.e. through the appropriate and approved channels in a manner that will not cause harm to the participants (adapted from the principles of ethical conduct from the Sociological Association of Ireland).

My ability and confidence to carry out this research in an ethical and efficient manner is based on the several trainings, workshops and seminars I have attended on conducting ethically responsible research and also participating in various kinds of sociological research. Most importantly, I received ethical clearance (see Appendix 4) from the University of South Africa (UNISA), after successfully completing the proposal phase of my research. This ethical clearance gave me the permission to carry out fieldwork and complete my research.

## **1.9 Outline of Chapters**

There are ten chapters in this thesis, each focusing on different aspects of the research topic. Each chapter begins with an introduction to the issues discussed in the chapter at hand and ends with a paragraph titled, conclusion.

Chapter one presents and conveys the background to the study of commuter marriages in Jos, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions and research objectives as well as the rationale for the study. The chapter concludes with an outline of all the chapters of the research.

Chapter two engages with the theory used in the study. The Life Course Theory was considered appropriate for this research as the theory focuses on interaction between work and family events while determining the causes and effects of these interactions; the study itself is a study of work and family. An understanding of how the Life Course Theory and Commuter marriages interact is carried out in a discussion in the chapter which uses two principles of the life course- agency and linked lives to elaborate the relationship. This research also looks at the gendered life course of individuals with respect to the gender roles of the participants in the study.

Chapter three gives an overview of relevant and related literature on commuter couples. The chapter highlights the distinctions between commuter marriages and other non-traditional forms of marriages. Furthermore, the chapter has a review of literature on contemporary African families.

Chapter four discusses the research design and methodology used in the study, giving a step-by-step report on how the data were collected and analysed. The chapter examines the qualitative research design as it relates to the study. In addition, how participants were selected for the study as well as their socio demographic characteristics and the distances they travel as commuter spouses are discussed in detail. The chapter also presents the location of the study, the ethical aspects, my reflections while collecting data as well as a discussion on the limitations of the study.

Chapter five presents the first finding of the study and partly answers the first research question asked about how commuter couples are affected by the commuting lifestyle, the chapter is titled the commuter marriage trajectory. The chapter discusses the factors that led to participants



engaging in a commuter marriage as well as their reflections as commuter couples. Further discussions on the ABC's, that is the ambivalence, benefits and challenges of a commuter marriage are highlighted in the chapter; participants also narrated the perceptions of their family and friends as it affected the commuting relationship.

Chapter six continues to explore how commuter couples are affected by a commuter relationship with a discussion on finances in the commuter family. Findings show that commuter couples spend a lot of money on travelling and phone calls as well as on paying two house rents in their various locations. Participants also reveal that they spend money on extended family obligations. The roles and attitudes of husbands and wives regarding finances were also studied.

Chapter seven examines the first part of the second research question asked with regards to how the commuter couples cope in a commuter marriage. The practice of marriage in a commuter relationship examines how couples maintain a marital relationship in the midst of constant separation; the communication patterns of couples are explored. Furthermore, the chapter examined what a typical day was like in the lives of commuter wives as they are the ones in the primary home of residence. It is gathered that commuter couples engage in non-traditional gender roles as a result of their being apart from each other and as such, they get used to handling the roles of the absent spouse.

Chapter eight continues to answer the second research question by examining commuter couples and their social support networks. Four categories of support were found to be available and useful to commuter couples to help them cope in a commuter marriage, namely: Family support, employers' support, domestic help, and personal faith including prayers and church attendance.

Chapter nine examines the relationship between fathers and children in a commuter family. This chapter became necessary as more commuter wives than husbands participated in the study and they had narratives on parenting in a commuter family. Another factor that necessitated these discussions are based on the theoretical framework of this research. The life course of the parent's marital journey has an impact on children. Parenting is a part of the couple's life course and the relationship between children and parents has an impact on children's later years. Discussions in this chapter bordered on fatherhood practices, discipline and children's reaction to father absence.

Finally, chapter ten concludes the study by briefly examining the research questions and key research findings, the theoretical framework, the limitations to the study, contributions to knowledge from the study and suggestions for further research. The chapter also offers insightful recommendations that may help to address some of the problems that were acknowledged in the study in relation with the research topic. The recommendations also serve to answer the third research question about how commuter couples can be helped.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter presented information on the background to the study, the problem statement, the research questions, the research objectives, rationale for the study, the theoretical framework of the study, an overview of the research design and finally an outline of chapters.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE FAMILY LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the theoretical perspective used in this research to describe commuter couples in Nigeria. The research will rely on the Family Life Course Perspective<sup>1</sup> as the theoretical framework of reference. This theory is considered apt due the fact that the study focuses on interaction between variables or events- work and family- and the causes and effects of these interactions. In this chapter, an overview of the theory is given with a focus on a gendered life course perspective as well as a discussion on how the theory applies to commuter marriages in Nigeria.

#### **2.2 An Overview of the Family Life Course Perspective**

The major construct of the Life Course Perspective is its concern with individuals in families through their lifetime based on the assumption that these families may go through transitions, stages or events that are focused in time and space. Elder (1998, p.5) describes it thus:

In concept, the life course generally refers to the interweave of age-graded trajectories, such as work, careers and family pathways, that are subject to changing conditions and future options, and to short-term transitions ranging from leaving school to retirement.

The author continues by saying:

Life course theory and research alert us to this real world, a world in which lives are lived and where people work out paths of development as best they can. It tells us how lives are socially organized in biological and historical time, and how the resulting social pattern affects the way we think, feel, and act. All of this has something important to say about our field of inquiry. Human development is embedded in the life course and historical time. Consequently, it's proper study challenges us to take all life stages into account through the generations, from infancy to the grandparents of old age. (Elder,1998, p.9)

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<sup>1</sup>The Family Life Course Perspective should not be confused with the Family Life Cycle Perspective which deals with the emotional and developmental stages individuals go through as members of a family(Walsh&McGoldrick 2013) .

<sup>2</sup>There is an entrenched form of rural-urban migration in South Africa that has been brought about by the past apartheid regime which is different from the experiences in other countries (Kok & Collinson 2006).

The life course theory cannot be attributed to one field of discipline alone as it draws on insights from various disciplines and fields of study. Prominent among them are sociology and psychology. In the early 1960s and 70s, many longitudinal studies were carried out in an attempt to give credence to the theory after many other theories (such as the life cycle approach and socialization theory) closely related to the life course could no longer provide adequate answers to societal and social changes. One of the most widely acknowledged studies in this regard was Glen Elder's (1974) classic '*children of the great depression*' which chronicled hard times in the family and children's experiences over time. The result not only related their limitations but also highlights the successes of many men and women who rose above the challenges of getting jobs, education and the care of nurturing families. Because of this historical work, the theory has gone through reconstruction and modification. The life course is focused on the individual, but uses the family context to examine the individual life course.

Aldous (1996) explains the life course perspective as a conceptual framework that assumes that families undergoing the same transitions are likely to display the same characteristics which may not be necessarily relevant for all families in the same life stage. The life course perspective does cover the entire history of the marriage (or relationship) but applies its premise based on the stages that the family is in at the time it is being examined. Aldous (1996, p.8) awards the perspective with the ability to determine "special stage characteristics that make them distinctive" and "also place the family in its societal context and historical era to obtain perspectives on change". The life course framework seems adapted to provide answers to the research questions for this study.

The life course has been termed as both a concept and a theory. Crosnoe & Elder (2015, p.80) define the concept of the life course as "the socially structured sequences of events and roles that organize and direct the life trajectories of individuals." They further define the theoretical framework as one that "emphasizes the dynamic mutual influences between the age-graded sequences of the life course and unfolding patterns of development, adaptation, and experience within economic, social, cultural, and historical context."

Giddens & Sutton (2014, p.123) describe the life course, simply as "the individual's movement through various socially created transitions during the course of their life." While Levy & the Pave Team (2005) state that the life course theory is important as everything humanly

significant can be found in the life course as it takes into full account that lives are a continuing process. The life course is also of an integrative nature as different social fields are taken into consideration and treated on their own merit as is found in different sociology and psychology fields, for example, family, work, education, and crime, deviance and the criminal justice system.

### **2.2.1 A Sociological View on the Family Life Course Theory**

The theory is concerned with studying and understanding how individual lives evolve and unfold over time. The life course perspective integrates individual and family studies. It also represents a major change in how human lives are studied and thought about. It is used in research, providing a framework for examining individual lives in relation to aspects such as crime, family health, and demographic history and in various scholastic disciplines, including sociology and psychology, as mentioned above. (Hunt 2005; O'Rand 2012)

The sociological view of the life course looks at transitional stages that mark specific changes in human life. Transitions in the life course are affected by varying cultures and the material or economic circumstances of any given society over time. Other social factors such as social class and ethnicity also influence experiences along the life course (Giddens & Sutton 2014).

The sociological view is also complex and intricate, allowing it to be viewed in various ways, transitions are a series of movements from one social stage to the next for example from being a student to being a worker. These stages of transitions are negotiated processes in which the mode of transition, the participation and experience of each individual would differ (O'Rand 2012).

White & Klein (2008) opine that life course analysis evolved from a sociological concern about the dependent events experienced by individuals over the life course. Their argument is that the life course approach is a sociological approach which relies on societal norms to direct and mould adult and child development. Societal norms determine how families are to live their life course and deviation from the norm has consequences for social change. These norms also allow a range of acceptable behaviour. According to them, the life course theory examines the event history of an individual's life and how past events colour later events.

Sociologists are also concerned with how history and biography or life histories overlap as whole generations have diverse life courses; the life course is concerned with experiences of human life from start to finish as well as the link between demographic processes and social structure.

Contemporary real-life changes have an impact on the life course. The life course is flexible in its assumption that the social system is always changing with an increasing chance of discontinuities in life experiences (Elder 1978; Bengtson & Allen 1993; Kain 1993; Mayer 2002; Hunt 2005; White & Klein 2008; O’Rand 2012; Giddens & Sutton 2014).

## **2.3 Explaining Life Course Terms**

In definitions and discussions of the life course, three basic terms usually appear. These are transitions, trajectories and turning points. These are highlighted here to give clarity to further reading of this chapter.

### **2.3.1 The Three ‘T’s’ in the Life Course**

Transitions refer to the idea of change, sometimes short term and complex changes, such as, change from one role to another, one state to another, or one situation to another. It involves moments within a trajectory and more often than not, has an outcome, is limited in time and is applied to the changes in an individual life course. Transitions typically result in status change, change in social identity and role involvement (Levy et al 2005; Crosnoe & Elder 2015). Some possible transitions are concluding school, getting married, getting a job and having a first child. Elder (1974) further indicates that these crucial transitions may occur in the life course over a short period of time. Casper & Bianchi (2002) are of the view that the study of transitions from one stage or event are vital in the contemporary study of the life course stating that key events in the transition process include work and family decisions. Transitions in one life stage can influence transitions in another stage, for example, graduating the high school (secondary school) and going on to graduate at a higher institution with high grades could lead to a good job that may give the incentive to settle down and start a family, guarantee access to basic needs and more. Another scenario is getting pregnant before graduating from school, this could alter a young girl’s dream of graduating and getting married, getting a good job since she is a single mother with limited income. This mother may still get ahead in life by making choices that could again alter her current situation, she could go back to school or learn a trade that could help enhance her present economic status.

White & Klein (2008) further explain transitions as shifts from one family stage to another. Whether family transitions and paths taken or not taken in a family’s life, that could determine an alternative or new transition, is very much embedded in societal norms. For example, giving

birth after marriage versus having a child before marriage could determine the transition for such a family. Transitions do not always bring about a turning point, but a transition can become a turning point when it requires extraordinary social adjustments (Hutchison 2011).

Trajectories are more long-term patterns of stability and change and may have multiple transitions fixed into them. They play out within particular spheres of life, including work and family decisions. The timing of these transitions can be observed according to the age of individuals, the timing of their lives and/or the duration between transitions. Trajectories in an individual's life are often interconnected with others "especially significant others... across generations and gender" (Casper & Bianchi, 2002, p. xxiv).

Trajectories are long-term patterns of stability and change, which usually involve multiple transitions (Hutchison 2011, White & Klein 2008). For example, an individual's marital trajectory may include several transitions such as breaking up with a partner, living apart together, commuting and living and sharing lives together. When major transitional changes occur in trajectories, it could lead to a turning point (Levy et al 2005).

Turning points could be described as events. Events are particular moments in a specific time and place complete with certain characters, actions and thoughts. Events have time intervals of entry and exit with examples such as moving between regions, major illnesses or the death of a spouse or child (Levy et al 2005, Blossfeld & Blossfeld 2015). Events could be expected (normative) or stressful. Stress is characterized by the length of time between life events (George 1993). Where events are stressful, researchers look at what consequence, it has on the life course of an individual. The amount of stress caused by the event depends on its social context and meaning attached to the event (Levy et al 2005).

### **2.3.2 The Four Fundamental Principles of the Life Course**

According to Elder (1994), the following four fundamental principles characterize the life course: Lives and historical time, timing of lives, linked lives and social ties, human agency and personal control. These principles explicate how individual experiences are linked to a larger socio-historical context.

**Lives and Historical Time:** Hutchison (2011) describes this principle to mean that understanding individual and family development stems from a historical context. It is likely that the same historical events may have a different effect on different cohorts.

A discussion of the life course theory includes events over historical time in a family's trajectory. Within the life course, behaviours of family members change with events associated with 'multiple time clocks' such as historical time which can be measured by 'the impact of geopolitical and economic developments as well as technological and cultural change on the behaviours of family members' (Bengtson & Allen, 1993, p. 482).

Bengtson & Allen (1993) further state that, the family is a collection of individuals who interact within changing social contexts across time and space and that the life course emphasizes the meaning of time and process on family life. Time is analysed as transitions that alter selves, as in the timing of events which could lead to a short change or lead to a trajectory.

**Timing of Lives:** This principle claims that certain roles and behaviour are associated with particular age groups. Age is a major variable; many societies organize themselves and their institutions around age. For example, at what age to start school, age to start work, age to get married, age to retire, etc. (Elder 1974, 1994; Hutchison 2011).

White & Klein (2008) refer to this stage as the timing of events. Time may not be measured as the orderliness of our wristwatches, but in the timing of events or occasions in a family such as when we had our first child or when we lived in the old house and so forth, they call this social process time i.e. the timing of when major events in the family take place.

**Linked Lives and Social Ties:** This principle is of the view that human lives are linked and dependent on each other. Experiences are felt not just by those directly affected, but by those close to them. Individuals have a network of social relationships with close family members (the significant other), distant family members, friends and colleagues. Gillis (2001); Casper & Bianchi (2002); Hunt (2005) and O'Rand (2012) state that the degree of control the individual has over the transition and the legitimization by others in that process of transiting are very important for the person transiting. A statement from an interview in Elder (1974, p.113) sums it up "You think your life is your own, but each life affects the next, and each generation affects the next".



**Human Agency and Personal Control:** This principle asserts that individuals plan their life course through the decisions that they make and how they act it out. These choices are usually made because the individuals involved are able to exercise a measure of control over these decisions as Elder (1994, 1998) and Hitlin, Anderson & Elder (2015) propose, they further observe that individuals go through their lives as they encounter obstacles and opportunities. This is explained by Elder (1974), who reports that an individual who has no support financially from family and wants to succeed in life, makes use of their own resources such as intelligence, ambition and motivation. This reflects greatly on their level of attainment and life situation.

In addition to these life course terms and principles, a later development in the life course approach is a gendered interpretation as is explained next.

## **2.4 The Gendered Life Course**

Moen (2016) explains a gendered life course as a view that highlights gender as a key factor affecting the nature of work and career paths. This view is particularly important as women in work- life studies have been ‘balancing’ the work and family life more and these studies have focused more on individuals in work-life studies, rather than the social structures and culture these studies are engaged in (Moen 2001).

In further discussions, the gendered life course, is described as the gaps identified between present day realities and outdated expectations and rules around the priorities and pathways of individual men and women on the life course. These gaps are referred to as structural lag and it is often women who accommodate this lag (Rusconi, Moen & Kaduk 2013). For example, the structural lag can be seen in transitions to parenthood which comes with new demands, emotions and insights and in situations where professional women are often strategic in their work and family choices.

The cultural settings in which a family resides are relevant to the life course of the family being analysed and the gendered life course helps us examine families in this regard. The gender roles played by each member of the family are viewed as important for their social interactions as gender has a direct impact on the duration of roles, timings and social relations. Moen (2001:180) states that ‘men and women in the same types of roles experience distinct impacts in the context of the roles they play and opportunities they have’, adding that social structures play a key role (Mortimer & Moen 2016).

The gendered life course takes gender into consideration in each of the fundamental principles of the life course, i.e. lives and historical timing, timing of lives, linked lives and social ties and human agency. For example, the timing of events is different for husbands and wives due to location, impact and paths as each stage of the life course impacts differently for each gender. Also, women's employment paths are dependent on their husbands as it relates to linked lives, emotion work and caregiving. Moen (2001, p.189) states it thus:

‘Women's lives are typically contingent lives, shaped around the experiences of others; their husbands, children, and parents. Although this is obvious in the early child-rearing years of adulthood... women continue to shape their choices (involving retirement, for instance) around those of their husbands and their caregiving of aging and infirm relatives’.

There are inequalities across the life course, giving women more burden with wives doing most of the female and male household tasks and men doing fewer compared to women (Moen 2011;2016).

This research relies on the gendered life course as this study focuses on work and family balance, but also acknowledges the cultural context of the Nigerian society which is more traditional or fixed in terms of family and marital norms. Moen (2011, p.88) states that when studies focus on the family work life balance,

“ ‘Balance’ ignores family adaptive strategies: individuals and families making strategic selections, such as prioritizing husbands’ careers, having fewer children, having them later in life or remaining Childfree; moving ailing parents to live closer; shifting caregiving burdens, changing jobs, working part-time, and opting out...”

and continues by stating that ...

“A gendered life course framing emphasizes the dynamics and complexity of lives. Men's and women's life paths are distinctly different as a result of pre-existing cultural schema reproduced in the process of doing gender along with doing race and class... in the light of the existing labour market and career policies and practices producing/ reproducing gender inequality at home and at work” (Moen, 2011, p.88-89).

These family adaptive processes/ strategic actions are very important in terms of this study on commuter couples as the roles of the male breadwinner, worker, father; and the female homemaker, wife, mother and employee are discussed in the Nigerian context.

## **2.5 Applying the Life Course Theory to Commuter Marriages**

Hunt (2005) argues that the life course approach can be applied universally as there are marked similarities between societies. He further states that global forces make the world a smaller place as “Globalization is seen as impacting localized culture in which life courses may be well established” (Hunt 2005,p.29). One implication of globalization is that due to new technology, many people are exposed to the culture of others, have the same lifestyle choices and ‘speak the same language’. This is of course a controversial statement since families all over the world are involved in the care of other family members, but the way in which care should be given, may differ markedly between societies regardless of globalization. In the next chapter families in Nigeria will be focused on more closely.

Families change over time. These changes are mainly due to socio-economic reasons and technological advancements which could alter the life course of individuals in the family. Family change makes families adapt, make decisions and choices differently depending on the historical time they find themselves in. Elder (1978) submits that with multiple career lines such as father, employee and son, come multiple transitions. This leads to the scheduling or timing of events such as when to have a first child or in the case of this research, individuals make decisions on when and where to commute to, when and if the entire family joins in the commute and when will the commute end.

One of the tasks of the life course is to describe and explain the path an individual takes (Mayer 2002). One such path is marriage and that is why the life course perspective is considered useful for the research on commuter marriages in Jos. This perspective will help to unravel how the interaction of events such as combining work and family; child rearing; maintaining and balancing the marriage relationship amidst the regular times of separation between spouses and other such events is manageable. The perspective will be used to measure how all this plays out in the transitions of individuals in families, and how they are affected with the passage of time.

The transitions individuals in commuter marriages in Nigeria go through is what this theory will help to reveal. Therefore, the timing of the commuter relationship in light of socio-economic changes as well as the multiple social roles an individual in a family plays is sought out and highlighted. This study, though not longitudinal in nature, seeks to determine if the principles of the life course stand as is or if they are subject to change or rearrangement especially considering

the different cultural contexts as Huiniuk & Feldhaus (2009, p.306) suggest, ‘life course analysis has to take regional differences within countries into account’.

To understand how the life course and commuter marriages relate, two major principles of the life course are used in the discussion. These are: ‘Agency’ (personal choices and decisions that could affect an individual’s life course) and ‘Linked Lives’ (social networks, kinship relationships and ‘the significant other’) as defined above. Hitlin et al (2015) posit that human agency and personal control are the most fundamental principle of the life course. Human agency implies individual choices made that could completely alter the life course of individuals and produce a new life course or path. These choices are made in order to alleviate some constraint or when an opportunity to improve one’s state is being offered. Corna (2013) specifies that oftentimes, spouses make decisions together about paid work and family life. This is a very valid point in commuter marriages where the couple involved, make a decision to work and live apart from each other.

Casper & Bianchi (2002) allude to the fact that the life course perspective emphasizes time and space and is therefore suited to view how work and family trajectories unfold together with its attendant consequences. This is because individuals make various choices when they are on certain pathways or make those choices that put them on certain pathways.

A commuter marriage, as has been already defined is a situation where a dual earner couple decides to live apart in order to pursue their different careers. One spouse stays in a primary home of residence while the other spouse, the commuting spouse, lives in a secondary residence at their place of work. This happens as the distance to travel back to the primary home is too far for daily travel. Couples see each other at weekends or after a longer time interval (Gerstel & Gross 1984, Van der Klis 2008).

That decision to be apart is predicated on the fact that working away is for the good of the family and could lead to significant gains later. The choices are not made arbitrarily, usually people make choices that they can have a certain measure of control over (Hitlin et al 2015; Huiniuk & Feldhaus 2009). For couples who embark on a commuter marriage, the timing of the event, i.e. when the commute takes place, the duration or intervals between home visits or other visits and the end of the commute, as in when the couple live together again or work from the same town or

distance is a decision the couple makes. Other decisions are who will stay with the children as well as financial decisions toward ending the commuter relationship.

Social ties and the input of a significant other, are extremely valuable. Huiniuk & Feldhaus(2009) assert that the perspective of one person in an intimate relationship is not sufficient to analyse decision making processes. When individuals make decisions concerning their future, they usually do not make those decisions alone. They imagine the consequences of these future decisions and determine what happens by contributing to it actively in the present even by interacting with others (Mische 2009). It can then be implied that commuter relationships, are relationships in which there is a joint decision-making process and some measure of control over decisions made. Hitlin et al (2015, p. 941) asks ‘What sorts of significant relationships serve to ‘push’ individuals...?’ While maintaining that ‘the principle of linked lives has rich possibilities for engagement with issues of motivation and agency.’

Commuter couples do not choose to live apart because they want to be away from their spouses, but because they believe that employment is important enough to justify temporary residential separation (Van der Klis 2008). Therefore, the point in a couple’s lives where they embark on a commuter marriage is a turning point. This event is an extraordinary moment in their lives as a couple and can also be extrapolated to a social group (Levy et al 2005). The said event could be termed stressful in the sense that it is not the norm in a marital relationship. Absence from a husband or wife puts a strain on the marital relationship. Locke, Nguyen & Nguyen (2014) and Elder (1994) imply that the timing of events could have adverse effects on individuals as well as long-term consequences. Some of the perceived consequences of this event could be stressful.

Gilles (2001) describes the principle of linked lives as social relationships that have the burden of amplifying how families are affected by change especially stressful change. Dual-career families and commuter couples in particular are challenged with integrating their lives at various transitions or events. Hutchison (2011) lists some life change events to include marriage, being fired at work, major change in financial state, changing to a different line of work, major change in the number of arguments with spouse, major change in number of family get-togethers, major change in living conditions, revision of personal habits, major change in working hours, change in residence, major change in usual type or amount of recreation, and a major change in social activities.

These particular events were singled out from a long list of events because these events are peculiar to commuter couples who are very likely to encounter one or more of these particular events. It is interesting to note that these singled-out events have a high stress rating. Hutchison (2011, p.18) goes on to say that ‘specific life events have different meanings to various individuals and to various collectivities’. In later chapters, these meanings will be analysed in detail. Stressful change is not implied in a negative manner as such. Patterson (2002) implies that family demands which are evidenced in discrete events of change could lead to stress, adding that in order to understand how a family deals with stress, the cultural contexts in which a family resides has to be understood so as to see how and why families are stressed and how the families respond to it.

This research uses the life course theory with a lens on gender roles to study family events particularly commuting in a marriage. The narratives used in discussing the findings in subsequent chapters, is not of one family in a commuter marriage, but people who share the same characteristics telling a different version of the same story or same experience bringing a strong body of evidence on commuter marriages and experiences in the life course. The stages and transitions of the life course are noteworthy pertaining relationships with significant others, decisions made and in the understanding of human actions and reflexivity.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Important life decisions are made by work and family choices and the life course takes us on a journey where the totality of our lives from infancy to old age is determined by paths taken, choices made and the degree or measure of control we have over these choices and with whom these choices are made.

The life course approach focuses on family change in historical time as it is affected by demographics and social structure as well as technological and economic changes. Transitions are an important element of the life course. Individual and general transitions are considered in how one person’s transition is affected by another person’s (significant other) and also the gender dimensions in these transitions. This affects how families adapt and the interpretation it is accorded. Family serves as a lens to view how historical changes leave its imprint on the next generation.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on a discourse on commuter marriages as well as related topics. This research focuses mainly on monogamous relationships and does not dwell on polygyny and extramarital affairs. Specifically, literature on the following are discussed: an overview of commuter marriages across the globe, including its benefits and challenges, types of non-traditional marriage forms closely related to commuter marriages as well as the role of women in the commuting family.

#### **3.2 Overview of Commuter Marriages**

Scholarly interests on commuting couples have been consistently rising with the concerns and attention given to dual earner and dual career couples as it relates to work and family relationships. The book, published by Naomi Gerstel & Harriet Gross in 1984 titled “*Commuter Marriage: A Study of Work and Family*”, is one of the earliest introductions to the topic.

Historically, couples have been known to be separated for long periods in order to work as seafarers, on mines, railroads, the army, domestic workers and migrant labourers (Jackson et al 2000). The concept of commuter marriages or rather, for couples not living together on a daily basis, is thus not necessarily a new phenomenon. Commuter marriages stem from work commitments in that a commute occurs because one spouse is working or pursuing a career away from a location called home.

In reality, a commuter marriage is an arrangement where a couple is separated from one another for a certain period of time due to work related commitments (see Anderson 1992) usually within the same national borders. McBride & Bergen (2014, p.1) define a commuter marriage as a type of long-distance marriage characterized by spouses living in different locations during the workweek (but sometimes for longer periods of time) to accommodate the careers of both partners.

One school of thought is that commuter couples are not so different from families that are not commuting (Anderson & Spruill 1993) while another contention is that commuter couples are very different from families living together (Gerstel & Gross 1984; Gerstel 1978, McBride & Bergen 2014). This distinction arises from the observation that couples in a commuter marriage still perform their traditionally assigned roles such as the husband being the provider and going out to work while the wife stays at home (even if she also has a career) assuming the responsibility of child care, grocery shopping, cooking and cleaning. The second school of thought, however, argue that commuter marriages are more egalitarian than traditional forms of marriage and both spouses perform different functions as seem best for the running of their individual lives and the family as a whole.

Commuter marriages occur when couples make the decision for one spouse to leave the home of residence or regular territory to get a job making the necessary arrangements to pursue their different careers. One spouse would usually do the commuting while the other spouse would stay at a place agreed upon to be the primary residence where the non-commuting spouse carries on with their own work during the time the commuting spouse is away. This home base is also most likely where their children reside.

Commuter couples are usually a dual-career couple (Gerstel & Gross 1984). Dual career couples and dual earner couples are sometimes used interchangeably in the literature when talking about a couple where both spouses earn an income. However, dual career couples are those spouses who both pursue occupational careers while dual earner couples are those spouses where only one, usually the husband, is pursuing an occupational career while the other, most likely the wife, is formally employed and bringing home a secondary income but is not pursuing a career. It may also be that both spouses are formally employed but not in a career track or involved in some other activity outside the home that brings in an income such as an owned business (Marshall 2004; Ayree 2005). Viers & Prouty (2001) further define dual-earner couples as being part of the general workforce and share a common residence. They also tend to have fewer resources, decreased power of negotiation with employers, and suffer more rigid economic costs, especially when the woman is not engaged in lucrative paid employment. Writing from an African perspective, Kobusingye (2001, p.3) defines the African dual career couple as ‘...spouses who are both employed either on a full time or part time basis, or any work



arrangement...who are self-employed including those who are considered non-professionals according to the Western World...’.

Over the years, it seems that the notion that commuter marriages are dual career marriages is challenged as scholars such as Schvaneveldt, Young & Schvaneveldt (2001); Holmes (2004); Van der Klis (2008) and Lee (2015) in their different studies on commuter couples include only one partner or spouse who is engaged in a career. In fact, Lee (2015) describes commuter couples in Korea as dual earner couples. Some of the participants in the researches mentioned above include students, and part time workers as well as international commuters. This category of participants therefore challenges the earlier (or rigid) view that commuter couples must be dual career couples. The essence of the commute is that the different partners in the marriage are happy with their individual jobs/income generating activities. This joy may not only be because they have a career, but maybe because of the gains they get from the job they are engaged in. These gains could be employer support, wage earning or the satisfaction of having something to do and somewhere to go. This pushes them to make the decision to stay where they are presently engaged while their partners commute to jobs they may find suitable and want to be engaged in.

In the Nigerian context, commuter marriages are not seen as conventional even though dual earner marriages are not unusual. What is typically observed is a scenario where one spouse (usually the husband) is actively engaged in a career/job that gives greater socio-economic fulfilment. This job requires him to leave their home of primary residence while the other spouse (usually the wife) is engaged in schooling, part time work, business and/or a full-time job. The characteristics of their home life are very similar to commuter couples around the world. A major difference is that men choose to relocate and leave their wives behind due to socio-economic reasons and not necessarily because their wives choose to stay behind for the sake of their jobs. Usually, this move is welcomed by the family because the social and economic cost of moving with the husband to his place of work is enormous.

### **3.2.1 Commuting for Socio Economic Reasons**

Families are constantly changing. There is an increased rate of social and geographical mobility. Owing to technological and economic changes, there is an increased rate of social and geographical mobility even among families. As a result, Forsyth & Gramling (1998) state that

what commuter couples are interested in doing is fulfilling the commitment to their marriage while pursuing career goals in separate cities.

Most couples who commute do so in order to cover some socio- economic gap (Becker 1981 Gross 1980; Gerstel & Gross1984; Settles 1993; Ermisch & Siedler 2009). Schvaneveldt et al (2001) in research carried out in Taiwan, also allude to the fact that couples commute for career development and employment opportunities, especially where jobs are difficult to find and the added advantages that come with having extra income in the home. Theunissen, Van Vuuren, & Visser (2003) report that couples engage in a dual career situation in order to achieve a higher standard of living, get a higher income, gain equity and to break out of gender role stereotypes.

The opportunity to move up the corporate ladder and get the job that would satisfy a couple's needs in most cases is determined upon having relevant educational qualifications and relevant occupational skills. As Becker (1981) argues, the only time that will be practical for a couple not to engage in a commute (if offered an opportunity) is when the husband has an especially high income or the wife has a very low educational attainment that going out to get a job will not make much of a difference in their income level.

Lee (2015) is of the view that economic vulnerability, career aspiration and family well-being determine a commuter marriage. By family well-being, she means a situation where the other spouse is hesitant to follow the commuting spouse due to the huge monetary commitments and the energy it would take the family to move as well as other considerations such as the children's educational options.

### **3.2.2 Demographic Characteristics of Commuter Couples**

When looking at studies on commuter couples in different parts of the world, similar demographic characteristics are found. This corroborates the view of the life course approach which states that there are similarities between groups of people in different societies which makes the theory universally applicable, especially since the similarities do not exclude the importance of the local contexts. Baldazzi & Romano (2006) state that those who commute to work in Italy are typically aged between 35 and 54, male, married, university graduates, employed and may commute for lack of professional opportunities in their town. A few studies conducted in the United States of America such as work done by Anderson (1992); Bunker, Zubek, Vanderslice & Rice (1992); Anderson & Spruill (1993); Jackson et al (2000), McBride &

Bergen (2014), Lindemann(2017) also give a profile of commuter couples as college educated, professionals in their fields, both working and including more men than women. The mean age of the individuals was found to be between mid to late 30s with a range of 25 to 55 years and more men than women leave the primary residence. The main reason for the latter is that the primary home of residence, especially where children are involved, is usually looked after by the women. Demographic information on commuter couples is sparse and research on commuter couples has been minimal (Lindemann 2017).

### **3.3 Non-Traditional Forms of Marriage Closely Related to Commuter Marriage**

Commuter marriages have been described as non-traditional forms of marriage and have been misunderstood or confused with other non-traditional forms. Watt & Elliot (2017), define non traditional family forms as a deviation from life-long heterosexual monogamous marriages being replaced by alternative forms of relationships. Two of these forms that are closely related to commuter marriages are Living Apart Together Couples (LAT's) and migrant couples which are discussed below.

#### **3.3.1 Commuter vs Living Apart Together Couples (LATs)**

Throughout history, there have been several reasons for families to be separated. Some separation may be due to work demands or war and crisis situations. Various occupations demand that couples live apart. Such occupations include military and paramilitary personnel, who get transferred from time to place and from place to place, making it difficult sometimes for families to move together, politicians who may need to be in the state where the seat of government is and is far from the primary home of residence. For example, in Nigeria, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, is in the centre of the country and those appointed to federal office may leave their families in their home states and go to work in the capital. Other occupations include sales people who travel from one location to another without any real address in the places they travel to (Jackson et al 2000). These arrangements are not unusual. Members of society in this category may not have a choice in being separated from their families for a certain period of time. Society may perceive this to be a normal separation from their families esteeming the work they are doing as a service to the society, where they are under the authority of other institutions other than of their own voluntary will.

Living Apart Together (LAT) couples, however, do not fall in the category listed above. Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan & Villeneuve-Gokalp (2009) assert that the living arrangements of LAT's have aroused curiosity on the part of sociologists and even the media. They label LAT relationships as a new form of cohabitation that emerged first as a trial period towards marriage and later as a stable form of union.

LAT's are usually those who do not share the same residence, but are in a romantic relationship that is not based on any commitment at the moment (Ermisch & Siedler 2009). Levin & Trost (1999, p.281) define Living Apart Together (LAT) as "a couple which does not share the same household; both of them live in their own households, in which other persons might also live; they define themselves as a couple...LAT relationships can be constituted by people of the same or of opposite gender". Levin & Trost (1999) also make a distinction between commuting couples and LAT's based on domesticity. Commuting couples live in one household but one person may have an apartment when away from home, known as the primary and secondary residence while LAT's have two households and two separate residences, which are both of equal standing.

Turcotte (2013, p.9) states that in Canada, certain factors determine being in a LAT. The first factor he points out is age, LAT is much more prevalent among young couples. Other factors have to do with the marital status of the persons involved. Some separated or divorced persons as well as those with children chose to live in LAT relationships. One reason for this is to maintain their independence.

Little is known about the prevalence of LAT relationships in developing countries. Migrancy is, however, prevalent all over the world and is structurally similar to commuter couples.

### **3.3.2 Commuter Couples Vs Migrant Couples**

Categories of occupations who fall into migrant families include traders, seafarers, seasonal labour migrants who work on mines, farms, rigs and the like. Differentiating between a commuter and a migrant is a difficult task because of the fluid nature of their meanings and the fact that migration and commuting share specific characteristics. The term, commuting on its own may refer to those who travel far from home to work and return on a daily/regular basis covering a distance of roughly 30 km or more by train or car. These distances are usually to/from a town where the commuters do not reside (Kertesi 2000; Sandow 2014). Commuting can offer

an alternative to migration, making it possible to hold on to the social security a place offers through the years and it can also be a step before or after definite migration (Van der Klis & Mulder 2008; Lukic 2009).

Migrants move permanently or temporarily over a longer distance than the average daily commuter. There are diverse forms of migration. Some migratory patterns involve crossing national boundaries (external or international migration), others are rural, urban migration or even within the same region (internal migration) see Marshall (2004). In developing countries, the move is usually caused by high rates of unemployment in the area of origin as well as high youth population or an unstable political climate. Such factors may affect both skilled and unskilled workers (Adepoju 2005). Adepoju (2005, 2006c) makes a distinction between labour migrants and commercial migrants where the former are usually unskilled workers while the commercial migrants are the skilled, professional and self-employed migrants who offer their skills to other countries. In both cases, people are lured by the promise of better remuneration and booming economies where they can make money to send back home, thereby boosting the economy at home.

Migrant couples may not necessarily share an egalitarian relationship when compared with commuter couples (Cooke 2008; Van der Klis & Mulder 2008; Lui & Chang 2012). Commuter couples jointly decide that the commuter relationship should ensue and usually plan that it will not linger for an indefinite time. Another point of variation between migrant couples and commuter couples is that with migrant couples, the partner that migrates may stay away for a longer period than the average stay of a commuting partner. Where a commuting partner can be expected to be home every fortnight or so, a migrant partner, maybe gone for a much more extended period of time before coming home. One reason for this may be the cost of travel as Adepoju (2005, 2006e) points out. Daily commuting is expensive due to transport costs, a venture which the income received may not be able to cater for on a daily basis. Another reason is attributed to dangerous roads and another valid point being that some migrants are illegal at point of exit and point of entry and therefore do not have the proper documents to freely move in and out of their locations such that they may leave and not return.

Sudarkasa (1977), in discussing migration in colonial and post-colonial Africa, differentiates between labour migrants and commercial migrants. She states that more women were internal

and commercial migrants than men, a finding that has been corroborated by Adepoju (2005). Sudarkasa (1977) states that women who had to migrate internationally were mostly married and young or elderly and divorced or widowed. She further states that women who were unable to join their husbands, especially on international migration, soon found themselves as second wives or divorced. Migrants at the place of arrival usually have limited resources and may not be availed the opportunity to access free going in and out. Many migrants at the point of destination are treated unfairly with their human rights being violated (Anderson 2006). However, compared to colonial times, better transportation and media services are available for the migrating partner and the partner at home. These services, when made use of, could bridge the void of loneliness and absenteeism that could lead to a dissolution of a marriage. Adepoju (2005) highlights that women did not initially follow their husbands when they migrated. As times changed, and economic crisis deepened, women began to take the lead and migrate to places where they could get better economic stability. This has resulted in more female headed households that emerged out of loss of the male partner by death, divorce or male migration<sup>2</sup>.

### **3.4 African Families**

In certain African settings (and other societies) the extended family plays a crucial role in the lives of family members (Hunter 1988; Das 1993; Aborampah 2011; Azevedo 2011; Sudarkasa 2011 ). The scholars mentioned above also maintain that the nuclear family was imposed on Africa during colonization. In the Nigerian situation, colonization, urbanization and westernization all played a role in the nuclear family becoming commonplace (Otite 1991). The social change that the family in Nigeria has undergone has been alluded to by several authors, for example, Nnaemaka (2006) and Wilson & Ngige (2006). These changes have been triggered by shifts in the economic, social and cultural systems as well as increased modernization and education, increase in age at first marriage, less emphasis on the extended family, more emphasis on paid domestic work and all forms of wages that replaced subsistence economies, as well as other aspects of socialization including children's schooling.

Sudarkasa (2011) is of the opinion that the nuclear family structure is favoured by Western educated African women because it gives room for one wife, one husband (as opposed to

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<sup>2</sup>There is an entrenched form of rural-urban migration in South Africa that has been brought about by the past apartheid regime which is different from the experiences in other countries (Kok & Collinson 2006).

polygyny) thereby making the commitment of the husband more towards his own nuclear (immediate) family than the extended family. This line of thought follows what Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984) described when they highlighted the extended family in Africa. One of their concerns was that the husband may engage in rural-urban migration and lose his commitment to his rural (extended) family as he is likely to get involved in new relationships including marriage and raising children. The consequences of this behaviour, as highlighted by the authors, is that the extended family and the family left at home is neglected which may lead to undisciplined children in the rural area (based on the notion that the father is the disciplinarian) and scarce resources for both families in the rural and urban areas.

Some characteristics of present day African families are the impact of technological industrialization that has led to the specialization of roles in the society, the fragility of the extended family system that has contributed to families relying on professional and specialized care for the home, elderly and children (Masamba 1984). Azevedo (2011) also comments on some factors that have negatively impacted on the African family such as the unequal distribution of resources among the population and further states that some positive reinforcements for the present day African family are the enactments of policies that have allowed women to work and girls to go to school.

### **3.4.1 Contemporary Nigerian Families**

Otite (1991) states that the Nigerian family began to change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with industrialization, western education colonization and religion and uses these factors to give insight in the establishing of the contemporary/ urban Nigerian family. His description of the formation gives a theoretical perspective in terms of the social and cultural contexts in which the Nigerian urban family as we know it today has metamorphosed.

The urban Nigerian family combines subsistence farming with trading and employment and involves division of labour according to sex and time. These urban Nigerian families are formed through the Christian and Ordinance marriage or Muslim wedding known as the 'Nikkai'(Atolagbe 2012) rather than through traditional marriage rights. The urban Nigerian family is nuclear and places emphasis more on the husband, wife and children and has very few members of the extended as a part of it, if any even though urban family members relate with their extended kin in rural areas regularly through family celebrations, village meetings and

identification with family members especially parents, getting domestic help for the nuclear home and the like. As a result, both extended and nuclear families exist in Nigeria and none has replaced the other. Though the nuclear family is perceived as too individualistic and far removed from the rural family (Otite, 1991, pp.44-48).

The effects of urbanization on the Nigerian nuclear family include access to good education, improved health care and proper diet leading to reduced fertility. The Nigerian state, however cannot boast of equal quality access to these urban dividends to all families that live in urban cities. The consequence of this is that many families are faced with unemployment as jobs are hard to come by and urban values have led to declining traditional safety nets that could serve as a buffer for families coping with urban pressure (Abubakar& Dano 2018; Chirisa , Mukarwi & Matamanda 2018).

In Nigerian cities, the same factors which have facilitated the socio-economic development of the nation, such as increases in education, transportation, communication and residents embracing a shift in traditional norms- are the same factors which are held responsible for the deterioration of the nuclear family unit. Chief among the factors is the employment of men and women outside the home, leading to separation of family members, lack of proper cultural socialization for children and a weakening of family ties. Families employ domestic helpers to help take care of the home, but the domestic workers are limited in terms of the authority they can wield over children in the home and the socialization process they can imbibe in the children (Okafor & Osamudiamé 2006;Akanji 2012;Fasoranti& Olusola 2012).

Working parents in Nigeria have their various domestic responsibilities to fulfil in the home front and with the changing times and the current socio-economic challenges, there are changes in gender roles which are sometimes perceived as creating role ambiguity that easily lead to role conflict. Recently far more women have been working in professional paid employment in order to contribute to the home, in contributing in this way, women face a double bind of balancing their roles as wives and mothers as well as facing gender inequalities due to the traditional norms and values of the Nigerian society (Bigombe, B. & Khadiagala 1990; Okafor & Osamudiamé 2006;Akanji 2012;Fasoranti& Olusola 2012).

The demographic profile of Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and the seventh globally in the world, has great opportunities for her citizens in terms of manpower and other



resources, but it is dented by the pervading socio-economic climate which has great influence and consequences on Nigerian urban family life (CIA 2017,NPopC 2018). Data shows that fifty percent of Nigerians are married while less than 2 percent are divorced as divorce is rare in Nigeria (Nigeria Data Portal 2016). The demographic reality of Nigeria is that resources are unevenly distributed among the populace amidst bad political leadership ridden with corruption and greed. This has an adverse effect on social and economic development, making jobs difficult to access, causing families to adapt and cope in certain ways that seem detrimental to them and affecting the socio-economic reality of families. A direct result of this is the negative effects on dual earner households that makes them resort to unsatisfactory coping strategies that makes family life more stressful than it should be. Poor infrastructure, including erratic power supply, poorly maintained roads, inadequate health care and educational facilities, make resources difficult to access and life chances unequal such that it behoves on individuals to improve their quality of life beyond what the government offers (Akanji 2012; CIA 2017; Abubakar& Dano 2018; Chirisa , Mukarwi .& Matamanda 2018).

### **3.5 Challenges and Benefits of Being a Commuter Couple**

This section looks at various perceived challenges faced by commuter couples. The challenges highlighted in this section are not exhaustive. Gross (1980) asserts that there are two types of commuter couples, namely, adjusting and established. Adjusting couples are usually younger, both in their biological age and number of years they have been married. They are also characterized by conflict and feelings of guilt for not performing their unique traditional role and have few if any children. Established couples on the other hand, are older and more mature. Although Gross (1980) made these distinctions some time ago, it follows that the length of the marriage and the number of children a couple has, will bring different challenges. For example, issues related to raising children in adjusted circumstances, trust, anxiety, finances, keeping the love and excitement alive in a marriage, levels of stress, communication and different benefits such as independence, a healthier lifestyle and greater concentration and attention to individual jobs/ careers will be affected by the length of marriage and how many children a couple has, if any.

### **3.5.1 Challenges Faced by Commuter Couples**

One major drawback of the commuter marriage is the interference of work schedules and family life. This could be in the form of inflexible schedules, immobility of work-related materials (laboratories, libraries, or computers), and employers who are unsympathetic to the commuting decision. Govaerts & Dixon (1988, pp.266-267) outline some of the sources of dissatisfaction among dual career commuter couples, including normative stress arising from comparison with the traditional societal norms, absence of intimate communication, the spouse saddled with the care of children and management of the family home has immense responsibilities, times of separation that are not pleasant owing to loneliness, guilt and dissatisfaction, especially for the spouse who is away from family everyday life, and responsibilities, the disruption to family interaction and the unique problems of advancing careers.

The commuter marriage is obviously costly in human resources, as well as emotionally and socially. The emotional cost involved are feelings of loneliness and lack of motivation as well as the lack of understanding of other people regarding the difficulties faced. For example, when couples have to face a tiring long day and are not able to immediately share with their spouse how the day went. They have to cope with not seeing their partners regularly to share stories of the day when it matters most. When it comes to a time when the couple can talk about the issues for instance, a week later, the event may no longer be relevant. Anxiety could also affect the health of the couple infringing on the quality of life of the family (Schvaneveldt et al 2001; Roslan, YanLi & Ahmad 2013 and Lee 2015).

Socially, commuter families lack the time to do many things that families who live together take for granted and they have to create special times to get some of these things done. Reunion times could become stressful as families struggle to accomplish so much in a short time and have unrealistic expectations of their time together. This has a huge impact on relationships with spouses, children, family and friends and could lead to disappointments and frustrations (Rhodes 2002; Ralph 2015)

The commuter arrangement is genuinely a financial burden. It requires a substantial income to maintain two homes, pay for transportation, telephone, and the required support services. When there is a financial leverage, difficult situations can be cushioned and the stress associated with

that situation can be alleviated (Govaerts & Dixon 1988; Rabe 2001; Schvaneveldt et al; Roslan et al 2013 and Lee 2015).

Society and commuter couples themselves also tend to compare their marriages with what they may believe are conventional relationships, this could lead to stress as members of society (friends or family members in particular) may assume they desire marital freedom and not career development (Gross 1980; Hertz 1987). Benokraitis (1996) also states that beyond stress, both spouses suffer physical exhaustion as the stay-at-home spouse (usually the wife) takes care of the children and their own job while the spouse who commutes may work for long hours and does not have anyone to come home to and may have to settle for dinners in front of the television.

In certain countries commuter marriages may account for father absence in many homes as has been observed by Depner & Bray (1993); Casper & Bianchi (2002) and Richter (2006). They suggest that fathers are non-residential due to divorce, non-marital births, changing composition of families and *work commitments* (my emphasis). Although father absence could be associated with negative consequences, such as children becoming societal deviants and an increase in child poverty, as has been described by Levant (1995), Popenoe (1998), father absence due to commuting may have different consequences, especially as the fathers in these households are physically absent due to work but remain present through phone calls and come home regularly.

### **3.5.2 Benefits of Being in a Commuter Relationship**

One major reason for commuting is that couples who embark on it, usually feel they can balance work and family effectively where work schedules, family roles and practices do not interfere, giving the commuters the ability and freedom to be in control of both spheres. This is very likely to create opportunities for career enhancement without the constraints of the family's daily business and increased opportunities to leverage the acquired knowledge and education. Moreover, the decision to relocate is often based on the best career option, commitment to the career and higher income and benefits to the family (Anderson & Spruill 1993; Lucchini, Saraceno & Schizzerotto 2007; Roslan, YanLi & Ahmad 2013).

While engaging in a commuter marriage, a situation is seen where both spouses generally engage in non-traditional roles where spouses take on different duties such as men cooking and women doing more driving and school runs. This makes the couple more self-reliant, gaining autonomy and mastery in certain skills otherwise not acquired and also efficiency in other areas while

breaking through normative structures of society. This fact is also helpful in that couples who engage in non-traditional gender roles do not necessarily bother about what others have to say about their lifestyle, thereby reducing the stress that could emanate from trying to fit into societal norms when it may not be convenient at the time. This also increases self-respect and confidence among couples (Govaerts & Dixon 1988; Anderson & Spruill 1993; Roslan et al 2013).

Most commuter marriages by nature, are often temporary decisions allowing both spouses to pursue their careers and maintain their marriage relationships until they are able to be in the same geographical location again. When couples determine that the commute is not forever, they may decide to work hard at it, working on building a strong marriage that can withstand the pressures of being in a commuter marriage (Anderson & Spruill 1993; Van der Klis 2008; Lee 2015).

Another benefit is the value placed on having proper and quality communication as couples are more aware of the existence of each other and see themselves as a team. This teamwork enables them and their partners to see themselves as offering support for the career their spouse is pursuing. Couples also value the time spent together and do not engage in unnecessary quarrels which causes them to stay in the present and enjoy the time together also giving them the ability to balance dissatisfactions with satisfactions (Govaerts & Dixon 1988; Roslan et al 2013).

Having examined the benefits and challenges of being in a commuter marriage, the next section examines the role of women in the commuting family.

### **3.6 The Role of Women in the Commuting Family**

As stated above, when a couple decides to embark on a commuting relationship, in many cases it is the wife who stays in the primary, home especially if children are involved (Van der Klis & Mulder 2008 and Lee 2015). Fadeyomi (1991), Milkie & Peltola (1999), opine that women have to constantly juggle their commitments between the roles of being mothers, career (or income earning) women and partners. While Sudarkasa (2011) believes that in Africa women play a conjugal role of first being a wife to her husband. As alluded to in an earlier section, African families are changing and where childcare was easy when shared by various members of the extended family, women in urban areas have to find ways to deal with issues that conflict with their work. For example, they may have no choice but to pay for childcare and domestic work. Tade & Aderinto (2011) state that domestic workers have been employed by working mothers to enable the women to fulfil their roles as mothers and wives.

Mothers who work outside the home have been described as doing a second shift (Hochschild 1990), triple workload (Nwabara 1989), being ‘cake winners’ instead of ‘breadwinners’ (Winfield 1985) and performing the “balancing act” (Milkie & Peltola 1999). Bianchi (2000) argues that when mothers are employed outside the home, they are able to provide additional financial aid to their families and the children are usually the beneficiaries of these rewards as with more income. Parents tend to always want to give their children a “better” childhood which thus costs money, such as providing better clothing, housing and shelter as well as, better schools, more activities outside the home, family holidays etc. The economic advantage of the mother working means she is able to cater and arrange for services that will help with child rearing and minding.

Early career stages within a family can be associated with low income earning and continuous house moves, especially closer to the place of work. As Hunt (2005) argues, these constant house moves leave little choice for women to grow their careers as priority is mainly given to men’s jobs. This can be rightly assumed to be the case for commuting couples in Jos, who mostly decide that the husband makes the move to the place of work, leaving the wife and children in the home of residence.

Winfield (1985), Schvaneveldt et al (2001) and Damaske & Gerson (2008) opine that women determine a commuting relationship with their work options, especially when they decide that they want to put their careers ahead of their traditional roles of staying at home and playing the dutiful wife. This assertion, in my opinion, is context specific in that some families may need both incomes. In the Nigerian context, women are expected to be engaged in bringing in some kind of income to supplement family expenditure, if not even take over full responsibilities such as school fees and hospital bills especially with the economy in decline (Okeke 2000; Bankole & Adeyeri 2014).

### **3.7 Knowledge Gap**

The reviewed literature reveals similarities between commuter families the world over with some possible links with commuting couples in Nigeria. There is no clear definition of African commuter marriages, but it is clear that the decision to enter a commuter relationship is mostly based on socio-economic reasons. The literature on families also has no lens on new family forms in Africa as these are under researched with little literature available. There is a need to

closely examine the gendered element in African commuter marriages, especially in the changing social and economic times. The African family is also in need of much more life course examination as it concerns transitions, trajectories and agency. This research will aid with an understanding of Nigerian commuter marriages while also providing data for comparative family studies in other environments and societies.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This section examined literature related to commuter marriage as well as other new family forms. Many Nigerian families transformed from extended to nuclear families, and new family forms are emerging, ranging from dual earner families to commuter families and various others. These changes can be attributed to aspects such as more formal/western education, industrialization, more women in paid employment, socialization of children outside the home and paid domestic workforce. The causes and effects of these changes are likely to continually impact on families in Nigeria.

Literature reviewed showed that commuter couples around the world share similar characteristics such as being middle class dual earner/ dual career couples. Commuter marriages in Nigeria consist of dual earner/dual career couples who have agreed to live apart for work and family reasons in order to close a socio-economic gap. There will be regular times (weekly, monthly, as they see fit) of coming together. The couple do not intend to live apart continuously and have a plan for the 'commute' to end at some point. These four elements- joint decision making to live apart, closing a socio-economic gap, regular times of being together as a family and bringing the commuter relationship to an end would characterize a Nigerian commuter marriage.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines and describes in detail the methods and steps employed in collecting data for the research describing commuter marriages in Jos. The research was conducted in Jos, Nigeria. Data was collected in Jos, using semi-structured interview guides and time diaries between May and November 2015. Follow-up interviews were conducted in December 2015 and April 2016.

#### **4.2 Scope and Delimitation of Data Collection Area**

The location for this study is the Jos Metropolis of the Plateau state in Nigeria. The population of Plateau state in 2006, the year the last census in Nigeria was taken, was 3 206 531 people (Nigeria Data Portal, 2006). Jos is the capital of the Plateau state and it is an urban centre. The Plateau State has 17 local government areas and combines several ethnic groups which provide some of the main cultural traits of the nation's rich cultural heritage (Plateau State Government, 2017). The growth of Jos as an urban centre can be attributed to the tin mining activities that took place largely before and during the colonial era. It is known today as the home of peace and tourism, although it has suffered ethnic and religious clashes which were at its worst between 2000 and 2011.

Adetula (2005) observes that a significant proportion of the population of Jos is involved in the public sector and the representation in the organized private sector is weak. This observation is what makes people refer to Jos as a 'civil service state'. This is not to say there are no thriving businesses, but due to low job prospects in the Nigerian economy as a whole, people tend to move to bigger cities which they perceive to have better prospects such as Lagos (considered the commercial capital of Nigeria) and Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory).

Jos is well loved for its peacefulness and beautiful weather as Maier (2000, p.195) aptly states that "with its mild climate and clean, crisp air, ...Jos is commonly regarded as Nigeria's most attractive city. It grew up around the tin mines of the plateau, and for a while during the colonial

period Jos hosted the biggest population of whites in Nigeria, after Lagos.” No doubt the white colonialists were attracted to both the beauty found in nature and the mining opportunities.

The choice of Jos for this research is based on the fact that I became aware of a number of commuting relationships in certain social settings of Jos, my hometown at the time of the study. Moreover, the different local government areas in Jos are all unique in terms of their spoken language and cultural traits; Jos is home to almost every tribe and ethnic group in Nigeria. It is also home to many expatriates and houses one of the oldest American missionary schools in Nigeria. The diverse cultural values found in Jos and being semi-urban, not as big as the commercial (Lagos) and Federal (Abuja) capitals of Nigeria, can help give a unique understanding of commuter relationships between urban and semi-urban settings. The research findings will also be a relevant addition to the commuter marriage literature across the globe from an African perspective.

#### **4.3 Research Design**

The research has an underlying interpretivist paradigm and therefore a qualitative research methodology was deemed best suited for the study. The qualitative method was informed by the theoretical framework of the Life Course Perspective as explained above, and also by the epistemological nature of the research which views how the actions of actors have shaped their world as it concerns couples in a commuter marriage.

Denzin & Lincoln (2000, p.8) state that in qualitative research, there is an “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being studied” and that qualitative researchers “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning”. Neuman (2000, p.122) defines the qualitative research approach as involving “soft data” in the sense that it deals with words, sentences and so forth in data collection processes. Its major assumption is an interpretative or subjective social science. Qualitative data give rich information about social processes in specific settings and also helps in giving an answer to questions that do not necessarily need figures and statistics to explain.

Qualitative researchers give actual information of the research setting and do not distance themselves from the people or events they study and ensure that research techniques as well as data analysed are valid, trustworthy, dependable and credible. This present study on commuter



couples relies on the commuter couples in Jos to give a description of their lived experiences using thick descriptions to make the study credible.

Creswell & Miller (2000, p.129) opine that to carry out a “thick description” analysis:

qualitative researchers employ a constructivist perspective to contextualize the people or sites studied and further state that the process of writing using thick description is to provide as much detail as possible in describing the setting, the participants, and the themes of a qualitative study in rich detail...for the purpose of creating statements that produce for the readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study.

Corroborating the statement above, Cho & Trent (2006) opine that various techniques can be applied to determine the validity of qualitative research and one of such ways is by enquiring how people under study interpret phenomena. An outline of how this is achieved is presented below:

Thick description has its heavy emphasis is on constructing texts in which rich descriptions are salient and in harmony with analytic interpretations... those concerned with thick description purposes delve into interpreting locally constructed meanings from the emic or insiders worldview...Validity as a process in the thick description purpose is holistic and necessitates prolonged engagement. This is familiar territory for qualitative researchers. An understanding of a reality in a certain context at a certain time can be better achieved in ways that proceed holistically. Given the fact that meanings that people being studied construct are typically unique, understanding may be incomplete unless all things are taken into account as a whole. Furthermore, an understanding of participants’ worldviews under study may be insufficient without situating meanings in context. For the contextual meaning to emerge in this thick description purpose, prolonged engagement from the side of the researcher is viewed as a necessary condition. Under the concern of validity as a process in thick description, major validity criteria that should be implemented are: (1) the extent to which data are descriptively presented;... and, (2) the researcher’s competence in making sense of the daily life of his or her participants. Thick description researchers rely on holistic processes, prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checking as transactional assurances. It is the interpretive component of thick description that matters” (Cho& Trent 2006:328-329).

#### **4.4 Research Population and Sampling**

Participants for this study were all married, had children, and were confirmed being in a commuter marriage for a year or more i.e. either a husband or wife who works in another state or local government area in Nigeria different from their spouse. I wanted to focus on couples currently in a commuter marriage as the experiences they narrate would be their current reality and living experience, therefore I did not interview anyone who had commuted previously and

was reunited with their spouse. For most of the participants, their primary home of residence is in Jos and the partner comes 'home' almost every weekend and not less than once every three months.

I initially identified couples to partake in this study by asking family and friends to help me identify commuter couples in Jos. This process is known as snowball sampling whereby the researcher identifies a participant with the characteristics the researcher is seeking and then asks the participant to identify another person with the same characteristics. Participants are usually expected to know the identity of other members in the same population (Chromy 2008). I also approached potential participants as I was aware of their marital living arrangements. When I told them the subject matter of the research, many were fascinated that there was a term for their kind of marriage or that someone was even interested in studying them. Those who participated were generally pleased to share their stories.

A total of 17 people comprising of 13 women and four men responded to the study. I used Gross's 1984 categorization of commuting couples to classify couples in this study. Gross (1984) proposed that there are two types of commuter couples: first there is adjusting couples who are younger couples both in terms of age and the number of years married with young children. The second group is called established couples who are older, married for a number of years with older children some of whom some may have left the house. In this study, adjusting couples are those who were younger in age and had been married for less than ten years and the established couples are those who are older and had been married for ten years and more.

Twelve participants fell in the adjusting category and five in the established category. I stopped looking for more participants in the adjusting couple's category when it seemed they were reporting the same thing indicating that saturation was reached. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006, p.8) refer to saturation as "the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook". For the established couples, it was not easy to get in touch with those I had been referred to and hence the smaller number of participants in this category.

#### **4.5 Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

The study engaged with more women than men as Jos is the primary home of residence of most of the participants which is usually occupied by the wife. The study covers participants from a

wide range of occupations including bankers, civil/ public servants, business men/women, lecturers, lawyers, teachers, managers of private organizations, accountants, politicians, sales representatives and medical doctors. The occupational categories of participants show their high educational status as the participants have at least a tertiary education. The ages of participants range from 30-52 years.

The participants had an average of two children each with three participants having four children, seven participants had one each, four participants had two each and three participants had three children.

On their commuting history, four of the adjusting couples started commuting from the onset of the marriage and three indicated that the commuter marriage actually began with a long-distance relationship. The least number of years engaged in a commute is two years and the longest is 21 years. Table 1 is a representation of the participants' sociodemographic characteristics.

S/N	Name (Pseudonym)	Sex and Age of Participant	Number of Years Married	Number of Years in Commuter Marriage	Interval Between visits	Occupation of Participant	Occupation of Spouse
1	Emmanuel	M, 40	4	2	Once in two months	Civil Servant	Business Woman
2	Linda	F, 32	4	2	Once in two months	Business Woman	Public Servant
3	Samson	M, 38	4	4	Once in two months	Lecturer	Teacher
4	Dinah	F, 35	4	4	Once in two months	Teacher	Lecturer
5	Henry	M, 47	7	3	Once in two months	Civil Servant	Managerial Position/Private Company
6	Ruth	F, 46	22	21	Once a year	Accountant	Senior Managerial position/ Private Telecoms Company
7	Uzo	F, 36	2	2	Once in two months	Barrister at Law	Sales Rep/Private company
8	Isaac	M, 33	5	5	Every weekend	Politician	Accountant
9	Saratu	F, 30	5	5	Once a month	Accountant	Politician
10	Lumya	F, 36	6	2	Every weekend	Medical Doctor	Banker
11	Tina	F, 40	18	3	Every weekend	Lecturer	Lecturer
12	Rebecca	F, 36	12	5	Every weekend	Business Woman	Banker
13	Michelle	F, 35	7	7	Fortnightly	Public Servant	Banker
14	Paula	F, 37	13	13	Monthly	Public Servant	Accountant
15	Natalie	F, 31	3	3	Every weekend	Public Servant	Banker
16	Praise	F, 31	2	2	Every weekend	Public Servant	Public Servant
17	Chizo	F, 41	17	8	Fortnightly	Public Servant	IT/ Private Telecoms Company

*Table 1: Participants Socio-demographic Data*

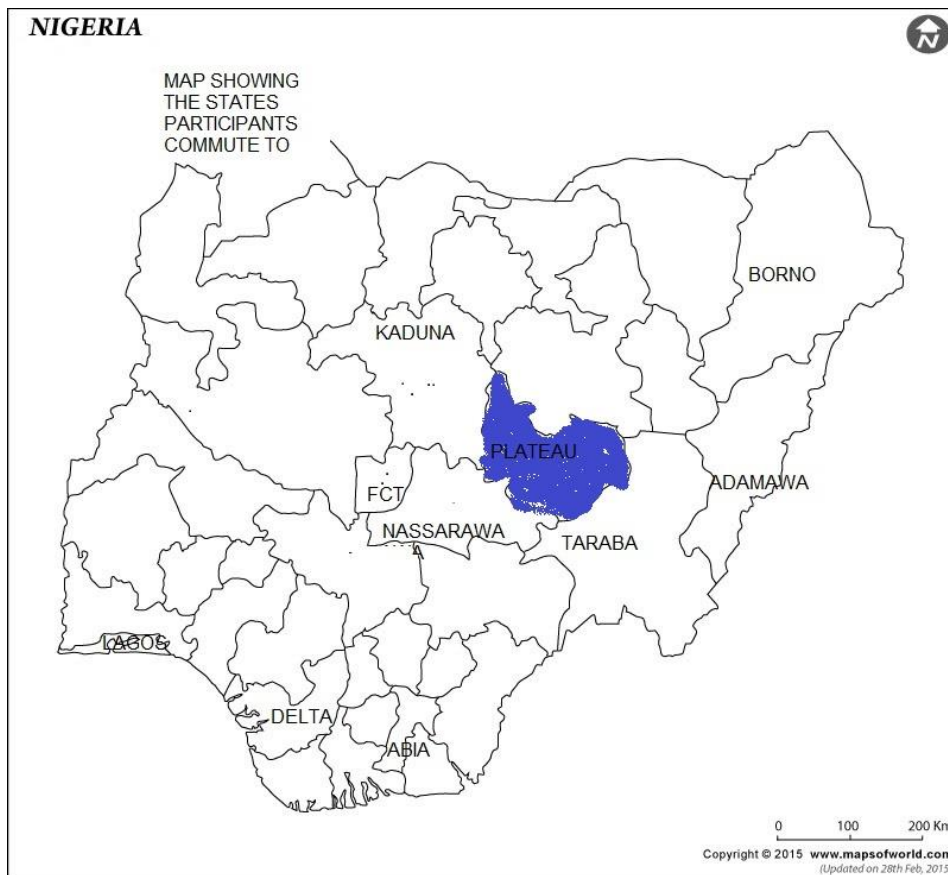
#### 4.5.1 Living Arrangements of Commuters

The home of primary residence is Jos for all the participants except one whose home of primary residence is Lagos. The primary home of residence in this study refers to the residence where the wife and children live based on the assumption that the husband is the commuter, living in the

secondary home. All the adjusting couples lived in rented houses as well as some of the established couples. Three of the established couples had their own houses at the time of interview while one moved to their own home shortly after the interviews. One couple had a unique arrangement where the wife and daughter lived with her parents in Jos while the husband lived in his aunt's home in Abuja. Another husband lived in his cousin's house in Asaba, Delta state.

#### 4.5.2 Distances Covered by Commuters

The map and table below indicate the different states in Nigeria that the participants travel to and the distances covered.



**Fig. 1: Map of Nigeria Showing States Commuter Spouses go to from Plateau state**

S/N	Commuting Location	Distance (km)
1	Jos to Pankshin	115.6 km
2	Jos to Kaduna	218.7 km
3	Jos to Nassarawa	227.5 km
4	Jos to Abuja(FCT)	268.3 km
5	Jos to Jalingo	511.8 km
6	Jos to Yola	527.5 km
7	Jos to Aba	735.2 km
8	Jos to Warri	769.3km
9	Jos to Maiduguri	580.2 km
10	Jos to Lagos	980.7 km

**Table 2: Distances from Jos to Commuter Locations by Kilometres (km)Source: google maps 2016**

As is indicated in Table 2, participants or their partners travel to Jos from all parts of Nigeria. Four husbands commuted from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja; one husband travelled from Warri in Delta state, another husband travels from Maiduguri in Borno state (one of the states where the dreaded Boko Haram group operates), another husband commutes from Aba in Abia State. Others journey from Nasarawa state, Lagos state, Kaduna state and Adamawa state. One husband commutes from Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau state. One of the husbands who now travels from Abuja to Jos, used to be in Jalingo, Taraba state. No participant in this study travelled internationally.

#### **4.6 Instruments of Data Collection**

Semi structured interviews, one focus group interview and time diaries were used to collect data from participants on the subject of commuter relationships. Although the interviews were the primary data gathering tool, the diaries provided additional information that participants may not have recalled or considered important enough to mention during the interviews. The focus group was not initially planned, but came about due to practical circumstances.

#### **4.6.1 Semi Structured Interviews**

Interviewing involves a shared process in which both interviewer and participant draw upon and use their knowledge on the subject to make comprehensible sense of the questions asked and the discussions arising about them (Johnson 2001). The interviews in this study were used to describe commuter marriages in Jos.

The in-depth interviews were done using a semi structured interview guide (see Appendix 1) consisting of 22 questions split into two sections, the first section collected socio-economic data and the second section dealt with the main thrust of the research.

The interviews were conducted in 2015 with follow-up interviews conducted from March 2016 to April 2016 to determine if there was any change in the participants' commuter relationships and also to clarify some questions that arose while interpreting the data.

#### **4.6.2 Time Diaries**

Time diaries are instruments of data collection that are set apart to capture the experiences of everyday life in a bid to study various phenomena and document experiences of everyday life. They have been applauded for being beneficial to the examining of reported events (Paolisso & Hames 2010) and 'minimizing the amount of time elapsed between an event and the account of this experience' (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli 2003:580).

The time diaries (see Appendix 2) in this study were used to investigate what participants did over a one-week period. The time diaries were given to the women who had also been interviewed. Where a couple was interviewed, the time diary was only given to the wife because she was the one in the primary home of residence. The only male participant whose wife lived in Lagos was not given a time diary as the primary home of residence was in Lagos and I did not interview the wife. As a result, only 13 time diaries were given out.

The time diaries helped, especially in the understanding of what families did in a typical day, to get a glimpse of how they spent their days apart from their spouses and how they cope during a typical day. The time diaries used in this study were designed on A4 sheets of paper where each day was divided into 24 hours over a seven-day period and participants were asked to write a summary of what they did during the day on an hourly basis.

Bolger et al (2003) defines this kind of diary as the interval-contingent based design. This diary design was guided by the underlining paradigm of this research which is social constructionist with the aim of describing a phenomenon.

The thirteen distributed time diaries were not all returned. For example, one of the participants travelled during the week she was asked to complete the diary and did not return it after she got back. I tried to get it back, but it seemed she had misplaced it. I did not offer another diary for her to fill as she travelled shortly after and I have not been able to get in touch with her. Of the ten time diaries that were returned, three were not filled in properly. An example of this is one participant who completed the diary based on what she does on particular days of the week and not based on what she did the week the diary was given to her.

Most of the diaries were completed even though some participants said they did not make entries every day, but as they remembered to do it (usually every other day or so). For example, one lady went on a weekend trip to visit her husband in Lagos and filled in what she did on the weekend as soon as she came back.

#### **4.6.3 Focus Group Interview**

Although not intended, one set of interviews followed a focus group method of data collection, as all four participants in that group worked in the same office and were willing to use their lunch break for the research as prior schedules to meet them individually was difficult owing to the inability to get a suitable time. With these four female participants, I did not conduct individual interviews.

A focus group discussion is an interview designed for small groups of people, who share the same characteristics, on a topic designed by a researcher with the aim of gathering opinions and processes about how particular elements influence one another (Duarte, Veloso, Marques, & Sebastião 2015). Richie (2003) suggests that a focus group discussion involves four to ten participants discussing the research topic as a group providing an opportunity for participants to hear from others as well as allowing participants reflect on their own circumstances, attitudes or behaviour.



#### **4.7 Procedure of Data Collection**

After I identified participants, I asked for their phone numbers from those who referred me to them and I called them individually and introduced myself, the nature of the study and scheduled a likely time for interviews. For those I knew, I called them and told them I would like them to kindly participate in my study. Some I did not call, but spoke to them when I saw them and scheduled an interview time. Some scheduled interviews were rescheduled due to other events that mostly came up on the part of the participant. As a result of this, some interviews never took place. The ethical tenets of this research were upheld in this regard, the informed consent of participants was very valuable to the study and I wanted to ensure that participants exercise their freedom to participate in the study or withdraw by choice.

Over the phone or when we met, I told participants I would like them to fill out a time diary as well as an informed consent form (appendix 3) which they agreed to. I also told them the interviews were likely to last up to an hour and depending on how the discussion proceeded; the timing could be more or less.

The discussions that ensued were facilitated by conducting interviews with the semi structured interview guide (see Appendix 2) and after the interview, female participants were asked to fill a copy of the time diary at their convenience but preferably within the week.

Four interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants during their lunch break, one of these was a group interview consisting of four women from the university. I could not get to meet them individually due to varying schedules, my friend who helped me identify them suggested we do a group interview and they all agreed. They knew each other and worked in the same administrative department of the university.

This became a focus group interview. I used the same interview schedule, asked their collective permission to conduct the interview and I gave them time diaries, which they individually filled in and returned to me at a later date. I was also the note taker for the discussion, so when I was transcribing the interview later, I knew exactly who was talking and I was able to transcribe accordingly. The focus group went very well as the participants all knew each other and there was something about sharing their stories together which made them feel like they shared a common bond. One participant said afterwards that she learnt a lot from being part of the

discussion and was wondering if there would be a forum where she could meet other commuter wives to talk about issues related to being in a commuter marriage.

The rest of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants at times that were convenient for them. The interviews ranged from 55 minutes to 90 minutes. One interview took up to two and half-hours because the participant was also attending to her children.

When filling in the consent forms, all the participants agreed to the use of a tape recorder to interview them. I also gave them the interview guide to go through before the interview began. This was in a bid to make them feel comfortable and give them an opportunity to ask questions or even withdraw if they wanted to.

Two interviews were conducted with both husband and wife at the same time. The husbands happened to be around when the interviews were scheduled and they agreed to be a part of it. I was also happy to have these men participate, as I had only interviewed one man prior to this time, since it was mostly wives in the primary home of residence. I noticed that in these interviews, both parties contributed and shared their thoughts on issues raised even though, the husbands spoke more than the wives. I was also able to interview one man almost a year after I had interviewed his wife.

While conducting the interviews, I asked the questions based on the interview guide and allowed them to respond. If there was anything that needed clarification or if they said something that was not really a part of the study, I asked them to kindly further explain. In the guide, the socio-demographic data section comes first and I asked them those questions first. I noticed that some participants felt uncomfortable giving this data, so after a couple of interviews, I decided not to ask those questions first. Instead, I stopped asking the questions from the section with the demographic data and asked them to fill it in with the time diaries and I collected both instruments together.

I also observed after the first interview I conducted that the participant talked more and explained her commuter experience on a deeper level when she was walking me to my car. This further explanation was not captured on the recorder so I had to write down very quickly what I remembered from the last part of the discussion in my notebook and include it in the transcripts. After this experience, I decided not to put off the recorder at any interview until we had parted ways.

All interviews were conducted in a cordial peaceful atmosphere, participants were happy to respond and they did not feel threatened by me. I also felt a rapport with the participants during the interviews. For those I was meeting for the first time, we had smooth discussions and this maybe because I was introduced to them by someone we both knew.

During the week that a time diary was administered to a participant, I texted them periodically using WhatsApp<sup>3</sup> and SMS first to thank them for participating in the study and to ask them how the completion of the time diaries was progressing, encouraging and reminding them to make entries. I also told them it was not expected to be burdensome to them so they could fill it in at any convenient time within the day. When they were done, they asked me to come and collect them or brought it to me themselves.

#### **4.8 Method of Data Analysis**

The data was analysed by doing a thematic analysis. This is a process that can be used with most qualitative methods of data collection. It is achieved by firstly, carefully reading and re-reading the data (transcriptions of the interviews and diary entries). Guest, MacQueen & Namey (2012) give the process and application of thematic analysis to involve a rigorous approach to identify themes from the data collected either through interviews or any other qualitative method technique in a bid to present the voices of participants in a credible and transparent manner. The themes, when identified, are coded and used to build theoretical models or used to find solutions to issues raised by proper analysis based on knowledge of the field of research.

The analysis for this study actually started from the beginning of this research. From related literature, I knew what to look for and also because I conducted all interviews myself, I was keen on what people said and sought to answer the research questions raised.

The transcripts from the interviews and the time diaries formed the corpus from which the themes were unearthed. In the data, I coded for themes from related theory and literature concerning commuter marriage. These were immediately identified and I was satisfied that there was a 'fit' in the data. As I read the data over and over, I also discovered some themes that were not necessarily theory related. Some of the initial themes that were not theory related were collapsed or later expanded to aptly describe commuter marriages from this study. The themes

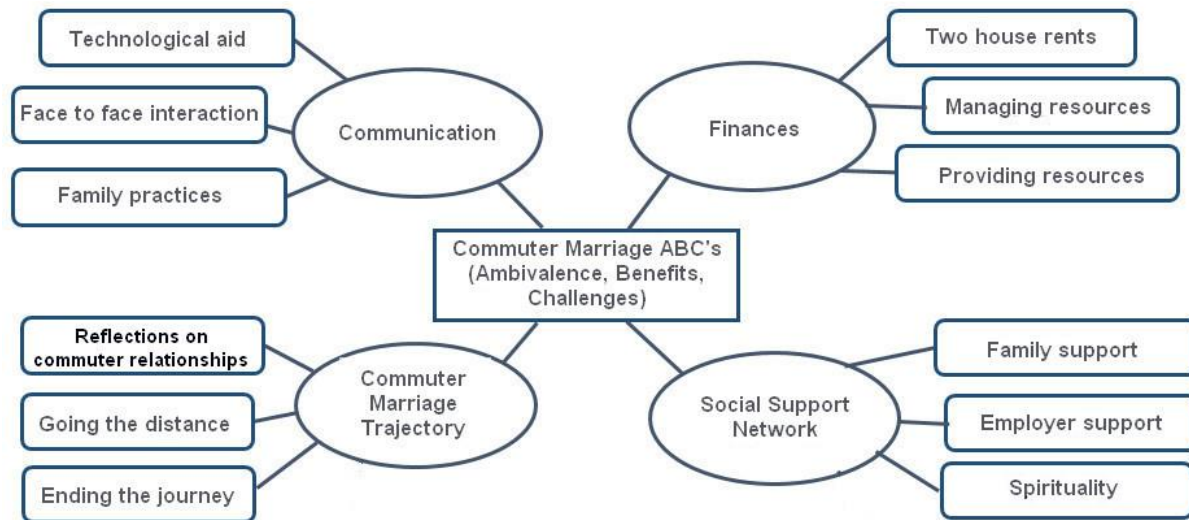
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<sup>3</sup>An immediate and inexpensive form of texting with a mobile phone.

are discussed and interpreted in the subsequent chapters. The figure below shows how the themes were derived using the Attride-Stirling thematic network analysis.

Attride-Stirling (2001, p.388) posits that applying thematic networks is a simple way of organizing unearthed themes derived from qualitative data. Thematic networks systematically extract lowest order premises evident in the text or corpus known as *basic themes*. Basic themes say very little about the whole text. Next, the basic themes are reduced to more abstract principles known as the *organizing themes*. Organizing themes amplify the meaning of the principal assumptions of a group of basic themes. This is followed by recognizing super-ordinate themes which capture the principal metaphors in the text as a whole, known as the *global theme*. The global theme is like a final position on the research and tells us what the entire text is all about. These are then represented as web like maps showing the salient themes of the three levels and illustrating the relationship between them.

Attride-Stirling (2001, p.389) continues by stating that thematic networks are presented graphically as web like nets to remove any notion of hierarchy and emphasizing the interconnectivity throughout the network. Thematic networks are not necessarily a new idea and are not the analysis of the research itself, but only serves as the gateway for analysis. The corpus of the research was broken down using this method. I followed the steps outlined by Attride-Stirling (2001, pp.390-402) to put together a network of themes and the following diagram was created:



**Fig. 2: Structure of Thematic Networks on Commuter Marriages in Jos, Nigeria**

This diagram is a pictorial representation of the link between the research questions raised in chapter 1 section 1.3, and the themes derived from the corpus. The answers to the research questions generated the themes analysed. The subsequent global themes became the title of the chapters and the subject matter discussed. Hence, the chapters that follow will discuss the basic themes represented in the diagram as well as other themes not represented, but considered relevant to the chapter in question, in detail and answer the research questions, giving adequate meaning and linking the findings to the figure above and research questions raised. A breakdown of research questions and the analysis is as follows:

What social dynamics are involved in commuter marriages in Jos, Plateau State? This is found in the global theme: - Commuting ABC's: Ambivalence, Benefits and Challenges.

1. How does commuting affect couples in a commuter marriage? This is found in the organising themes of the commuter marriage trajectory and finances (see chapters 5 and 6 for detailed discussions).

2. What are the coping strategies employed by commuter couples in Jos? This is found in the organising themes of communication and social support networks (see chapters 7 and 8 for detailed discussions).

3. How can couples engaged in commuter marriages be supported? This is addressed in the recommendation section in chapter 10.

The chapter on fathers and children (chapter 9) developed from the narratives as part of the compulsory transitions of parents in the life course. The discussion became necessary when mothers and fathers discussed their parental role as a major part of who they are.

Also, in discussing the findings, I tried to distinguish between men's views and women's views as well as between adjusting couples and established couples in their opinions concerning certain issues. McBride & Bergen (2014) conducted a study in which they were able to deduce men's voices from women's narratives on commuter relationships. This approach has been used to highlight men's point of view on commuter relationships, even though not many men's voices are found in this particular study.

#### **4.9 Language Used in the Field**

Nigeria has many languages, of which the Hausa's, Igbo's and Yoruba's are popularly known as the major tribes. There are several other minor dialects, but English is the official medium of communication in Nigeria. In the Plateau state, there are several local dialects spoken among various ethnic groups. However, the interviews were conducted in English which is a very common and acceptable medium of expression in Nigeria, especially among the middle class of which participants for this study are drawn. The time diaries were also completed in English.

#### **4.10 Limitations in the Field**

I tried to get equal numbers of participants in the two categories of adjusting and established couples but this was almost impossible. One reason was that established couples were not easy to reach due to work engagements and health issues. For some, we kept on rescheduling interview times until it was not possible any more. For example, I got to one of the established women's homes to do the interview, but she was not quite ready to do the interview and wanted to talk about something else. After that moment passed, it was difficult to rearrange an appointment.

I also really wanted to interview couples, even if not together or at the same time. However, most of the time, the other spouse was unavailable due to the commute and when they came during the period of interviewing, they were not available as time was limited and spent doing family related activities as well as community engagements.

This ended up being a mostly female narrative, and I am aware of biases that could arise from this. In a study describing family, Viers & Prouty (2001) observe that women are usually the major respondents in relationship studies and this leads to a gender imbalance in the study of couples. In as much as I did not get couples together and did not have many men, I tried to examine men's views versus women's views in themes identified in line with a gendered life course perspective.

The time diaries also had some drawbacks, one participant filled a week's worth of information in one day, another participant said she travelled within the week and did not take the diary with her so she filled the days she was away in one sitting. Another participant travelled extensively during this time and could not find the diary when she returned.

#### **4.11 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is not a method, but a way of thinking which aids to interpret, translate and represent data collected. It is also considered a characteristic of good research practice (May & Perry 2014). Reflexivity deals with how the researcher is connected with those they study, how they relate to them and the reflections of the ones they study. Usually researchers do not study a part or subject they are not deeply concerned with and are familiar with, and those they study usually have an idea of what is being studied and are often a major part of it (see Holmes 2010 and Morgan 2011).

In this study of commuter marriages, my reflections stem from the fact that I know a great deal about commuter marriages, since I myself am a commuter wife and I have talked and pondered on this countless times as well as listened to people's opinion on this subject. I observed that when I disclosed to participants that I was also in a commuter marriage, the discussion seemed to have a tone of "understanding" the importance of what was being conveyed.

The participants in this study also drew from their emotions and interactions with themselves and others, be they family members or acquaintances to talk about their commuting relationship. Their views may have also drawn heavily on societal norms and practices of what marriage is expected to be in the Nigerian society.

#### **4.12 Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations of this research are chronicled in detail in chapter 1, section 1.6. The ethical clearance certificate (Appendix 4) issued to me by UNISA granted me access to conduct the research after a rigorous proposal module. As mentioned, in section 4.6, the informed consent of participants was strictly and dearly adhered to ensure that all who participated in the research did so at their own accord. I also diligently ensured that my participants remained anonymous by assigning pseudonyms to them and protecting some of their identity as I wrote the findings. This was particularly important as some of the participants are members of the University of Jos community.

In handling research findings and reports, I upheld the agreement contained in the informed consent form and made sure that participants were not at risk and that the information they shared with me was properly reported and analysed.

The time diaries were also analysed ethically after letting the participants fill them involuntarily. I have kept the information obtained in audio files on my passworded computer and the filled in time diaries are kept safely away with other relevant documents in this study.

Having received the ethical clearance from Unisa and adhering to proper ethical guidelines as provided by Unisa, I have presented my research findings with integrity, excellence and using scientific methods to the best of my ability and as competently as I could. I have also worked on ensuring that I have made a contribution to the body of knowledge about contemporary African families.

I was invited to the research sites which included the participants' home or office or a mutually agreed safe place to conduct interviews and at those times, I tried to comport myself in a respectable manner and was not judgemental of them or the locations where the research was carried out.

#### **4.13 Conclusion**

This chapter detailed the methods of data collection and analysis. The study location, Jos was described. A description of participants was also given as pertains to their socio demographic characteristics and living arrangements. The choices about the use of semi-structured interviews, one focus group and time diaries as instruments for data analysis were justified as well the use of



thematic codes to analyse data. Some limitations encountered in the field were also highlighted as well as my reflections during the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **COMMUTER MARRIAGE TRAJECTORY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Some Nigerians jokingly refer to any spousal relationship, such as the commuter marriage where the spouses do not live together, as ‘MTN marriage’, referring to one of the popular GSM communication providers in Nigeria, since using the telephone is one of the easiest and most convenient ways for the couples to communicate as they are living apart. The societal assumption being that married people ought to occupy a single residence and not live apart. Gerstel & Gross (1983:181) emphasize that the interest in commuter marriage can partly be explained from its break with the traditional marital norms requiring spousal co-residence.

This chapter undertakes to describe the studied commuter relationships in Jos Nigeria, highlighting what led to the commute, the benefits and challenges of a commuter marriage, perceptions of family and friends about their commuting arrangement, participants’ reflections on the commuting relationship as well their views on ending the commute. While collecting data, participants were split into two categories of adjusting and established couples, with data collected from the wife and /or husband (see chapter 4). The findings will be reported taking these categories into consideration.

#### **5.2 Going the Distance: Factors That Led to a Commuter Marriage**

The first substantial question participants were asked was what prompted their commuting relationship. This question was asked in order to get the background of their commuting history and to find out if living apart was solely due to work related reasons or if there were any other reasons specified. Glotzer & Federlein (2007) opine that commuting is spurred by different motivations. Research investigations found three basic factors that are considered before engaging in a commuter marriage. The first being financial need and a desire for a better income, as Landesman & Seward (2013) state that commuting is mostly economically motivated. This factor encouraged the husband to leave the home of primary residence. Secondly, a joint decision where the wife was also working or engaged in pursuing her dreams made some couples choose to live apart to accommodate each other’s choices. Thirdly, the children and/or commuting

location, being the secondary home of residence were factored into the decision. The presence of children in the marriage made some couples rethink their decision and also consider what would be best for the children, especially after the commuter arrangement had started before the children were born or when they were still young as some children were already attending school or settled in some way.

The beginning of a commuter marriage marks a very significant turning point in the life course of a couple as multiple transitions occur during this such as changing residence in the case of the commuting spouse, children adjusting to new school routines that may not involve their fathers and mothers adjusting to not having their husbands around. At the same time, some couples are planning on building their own homes or have become parents for the first time.

### **5.2.1 Commuter Relationship Began Due to the Husband's Job**

Ten of the participants, namely: Saratu, Isaac, Uzo, Chizo, Rebekah, Ruth, Linda and Emmanuel, Samson and Dinah report expressly that it was due to the demands of the husband's job that they started a commuting relationship, although secondary aspects were also mentioned. Some of those instances are shared here:

*The commute started because of my husband's work, he is involved in grassroots politics in Jalingo... also the children's schooling was considered... basically, the choice to commute is based on the reality of our situation (Saratu F AC<sup>4</sup>).*

*I work at the University in Maiduguri, Borno State and I am also an artist/ photographer... many of the materials needed for work are not available...local materials are not found here, only when I travel to Abuja or Jos... and at the end of the day most people will have to be away for a while, both parties will have to bear and be considerate, especially when you are starting up, a lot of sacrifices have to be made by both. It is not easy, sometimes one party will have to move somewhere, like Nigerians will say, in search of greener pastures... I don't know any way around it (Samson M AC).*

*His work led to the commuter marriage when he was transferred out of Jos, six years ago.... (Rebekah F EC).*

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<sup>4</sup>F = female; M = male; AC = adjusting couple and EC = established couple.

*The move came about because of my husband's job employment to work outside the state capital... The decision was made by both of us. Initially I wasn't sure and he didn't want to go, but I ended up encouraging him to go. He almost missed his flight for the interview. We made the decision together... (Lumya F AC).*

Lumya is a medical doctor with the Jos University Teaching hospital. Her husband got a better job opportunity with a bank whose headquarters is in Lagos state, but he is posted to a Local Government Area of Plateau state called Pankshin which is 115 kilometres outside Jos. Working in a bank is not an easy job in Nigeria due to the perceived stress involved, which has to do with the nature of the job, balancing accounts, fraud and working late hours. These were some of the considerations they may have had when having cold feet about going for the job interview.

*The commute began because my husband was transferred to Bauchi and after two years he decided that he might not be transferred again., In that time, he had put our son in school and when that happened, I decided to move to Jos to be closer to the children, we put them in school and my husband was transferred back to Lagos. I got a transfer and took a cut in my work in the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN). I used to work in the international airport, now I'm in the domestic airport, in a state where on a good day, we have only one commercial flight that lands from Lagos and takes off (Chizo F EC).*

Chizo's narrative is insightful. It would seem that her husband's job was considered more lucrative than hers and would be able to sustain them, even if she delayed her promotion at her organization, getting a transfer based on family reasons. The international airport she transferred from in Lagos, is busiest airport in Nigeria and has a prestigious element for employees compared to the Jos airport that is a domestic airport, still under renovation and operates only one flight a day on most days. Oyebode (2016), gives more characteristics of both airports stating that the Jos airport was in a deplorable condition following lack of maintainance. This situation may not serve as a good working experience for Chizo following her Lagos experience.

Also, her traditional role of being the primary caretaker of their children was taken into consideration when deciding to come to Jos to stay with the children for as long as they were in school. Chizo's family's decision to commute is not only due to economic reasons because they

have very good jobs and positions. As a family, they also wanted a certain quality of life. The other factors that led to their decision will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Work, job transfers and the search for greener pastures is what most respondents put forward as the reason for the husbands being on the commuting trail. Job transfers usually come with promotions and/or better work and welfare packages. Okeke (1997) states that in Nigeria, husbands are considered the breadwinners with the basic assumption that they earn more than their wives and are responsible for the family upkeep and have the final say in decision-making processes. Okeke's views are still valid today and are explored in greater detail in chapter 6.

### **5.2.2 Commuting Relationship Began Due to the Wife's Job**

The preceding section described how the husband's job led to a commuter marriage. This section looks at how the wife's job led to a commuter marriage. Three cases are described below.

Henry recounts how they became a commuting family, he is a public servant working in Jos. His family moved to Lagos when his wife lost her job in Jos and got another one in Lagos.

*The kind of person she is, she can't be happy doing nothing, and the job she got in Jos folded up [ended] and so she went to Lagos. When she was here (Jos) she was losing weight, she wakes up at 4 am and doesn't sleep till 12 am and you will ask her what she is doing, she just wants to do something. Immediately she lost the MTN job, it was as if the world has ended, I even told her I would put her on salary, that we should share my salary, she refused, that neighbours will not come back home and meet her and ask her what happened at home. When I could not persuade her any longer, I told her that if she could get a job anywhere, I would let her go, so when we travelled for Easter she called her former boss telling him she needed a job and he gave her one. When she told me, I could not refuse her just to make her happy (Henry M AC).*

*I don't think commuter marriage is a function of deliberate choice, it is usually the result of circumstances and has to do with career. Work usually takes couples away. It is the work that takes people away. If I could afford to live with my family, it would be the first and best choice, but I can't afford it. My wife can't leave because of her job. I started working before her and when she got her job, we couldn't pass it up so we had to be apart (Isaac M AC).*

In Henry's and Isaac's cases, their wives started working after them and it was welcomed. Isaac explains later the contribution this brings to their family. Henry was glad to be separated from the family because his wife's job made her happy and satisfied. He suggests that they did not lack basic needs, but for the sake of her fulfilment, they agreed to commute. Henry's wife was likely dealing with the societal pressure which expects her to work and contribute financially to the family.

*This commuter relationship [they had been a commuter couple earlier in their marriage] started when my husband got a better job offer in his state of origin, and he decided to stop his job in Jos and move over there. At this time, I was doing a doctorate programme abroad, and bonded to my place of work. He left for a new job and I am in Jos with the children (Tina F EC).*

Tina's work and her obligations in terms of a bond to her institution makes it difficult for her to leave and join her husband. She works as a lecturer and got admission to do a doctoral programme abroad. The management board at her institution agreed to bear the cost of the tuition with the agreement that after her studies are completed, she will come back to her original place of work to fulfil her obligations for the number of years she was away, hence the "bond". At the time of interviewing her, she had graduated and was back at her place of work to honour her agreement with her employers and her husband had started a new job in a state close to Plateau state. As a result of this, her job is a necessary reason for them to become a commuting family especially due to the bond that will take three to five years in terms of rendered services to her employers.

Five women, namely, Natalie, Praise, Michelle, Paula and Uzo had a long-distance relationship before they got married and when they got married, it became a commuter marriage. Paula gives an example of the time she was in a long-distance relationship:

*We started as a long-distance couple right from courtship, he would come from Adamawa and visit me and go back and we started a family and it continued, so there were things I already knew I had to take care of (Paula F EC).*

The choice of Jos as home of residence owes to the fact that the wives had their jobs in Jos as this is where they were working as single women. They decided not to leave with their husbands when they got married. Gerstel & Gross (1983) state that it is the presence of two careers

pursued simultaneously, rather than the character of work in any one occupation that requires that the couples live apart. It is the wife's voluntary participation in, and even commitment to a career that makes the commuting a viable option.

### **5.2.3 Commuter Family Due to Family Situation**

Aside from the work-related factors that led to commuter marriages, some non-work-related factors were identified and discussed below.

#### **5.2.3.1 Children as a Factor in Commuter Marriages**

Apart from spouses getting a job that could move them out of their present locations, some other reasons why a family became a commuter family was because the children had become settled in school or were of school age and parents did not think that they should upset the children's programme by asking them to move with them to their new locations.

*The children's school is also a consideration. For now, there will always be one parent with the children because of school, for now, school is Jos and work is Taraba (Jalingo). Maybe when the children are able to be on their own, then I'll move to Taraba... (Saratu F AC).*

*Because he could be transferred at any point to a new place and we thought the children should have stability and this is where we are now... (Ruth F AC).*

Saratu and Ruth put a lot of consideration on the children being stable during their schooling years. The importance of children's education is represented here as a strong family value which is shared by many Nigerians. The couples figured that if the husbands would not be in one location for a while and would keep moving, Saratu's husband is presently working in Abuja and Ruth's husband's job is one in which he could be transferred at any time, it would be better for the children to be with them and have a sense of routine and consistency (Ruth later regrets this decision; this is discussed in subsequent sections).

The discourse on children, family values and quality of schooling is closely related to section 5.3.2.1 which discusses the quality of life for commuting couples desire as a benefit of engaging in a commuter marriage. In the preceding section, the emphasis was on the children in particular, as a factor in why a commuting relationship has ensued.

### 5.2.3.2 Issues of Location

Some spouses do not consider the location of the commuting spouse as an ideal place to live. Some of the reasons include living expenses in the commuting location, the children's present school and consistency in raising children as well as lack of adequate social amenities in the commuting location. These factors contribute to a commuting family as highlighted in the discussions below.

*I don't really like Abuja. Abuja is expensive. I won't be able to stay there with the children (Rebekah F EC).*

*I do not see myself as being in Taraba and he doesn't see me there either, he wouldn't be there if not for work. The place is a little backward, if it ever becomes as forward as Jos or Abuja, I'll go, but till then...I'm in Jos, my comfort zone. If I was in Taraba, it would not have been funny, I think, I would have been miserable, but here, I'm good, this is home for me so...whether he's here or not, I'm okay. Being in a comfortable place helps (Saratu F AC).*

Her husband further explains the thought process they went through during that period to make the choice to live in Jos

*The second year, when she came to Jos to give birth and be with her mum through the process, during that time, she got a job and it didn't make sense for her to go back to Jalingo, my family members kept on saying why don't you bring her to Jalingo. If I had done that... and four years later, my tenure is over, the next job I got was in Abuja so you can imagine making someone quit their jobs and keep moving, especially when they were just getting used to the environment. There would be no stability and it's not practical, so it made more sense for me to commute and let them be in Jos...Jos is perfect for raising a family, good schools, the people have a more balanced sense of life, family oriented. You don't want your children growing in Jalingo, its slow, our thinking is slow. Jalingo is extreme in that no good schools, hospitals. Abuja is extreme in that it is elitist, snobbish, expensive. I want my family to stay back in Jos(Isaac M AC).*

These accounts show that apart from commuting for economic benefits, other factors are also considered. Commuting may have started as an opportunity to get ahead and also to be able to



get scarce resources, but at a certain point during the commuter relationship, couples realise that the job is not the only reason for the commute especially when children and location of the commute are involved. This event marks a series of transitions for the couple in their life course as the timing of events, linked lives and decision-making processes or agency interact.

Where children are involved, it becomes a big task to take them out of school to a new school in a new town. The resources involved, such as time, money and energy become really enormous compared to staying in a place you already have ties. The social and economic costs of moving could be very high as Lee (2015) points out, it may be disruptive most times to move children to a new environment.

Another factor is the location of the commuting residence. When parents perceive that the new location is not ideal for bringing up children either due to social and economic reasons as Rebekah and Isaac say of Abuja, or because it does not have adequate amenities as in the case of Jalingo<sup>5</sup>, they then decide not to move with the family.

A final consideration is that for some commuters, especially the wives, the husbands were just settling into a new place and did not know the conditions of the place they were going to live in. Husbands could not really ascertain how conducive the new environments would be for the family. The finances to pursue moving the entire family at the time may not have been readily available, bearing in mind that adjusting couples are just starting a new life and resources may be scarce. For many of the couples, the thinking is most likely that there is a home in Jos already, the husband is only going to ‘manage’ in one place and come home frequently. They then realise that the wife is settled and children are also settled, becoming a trailing spouse becomes impossible.

### **5.3 The ABC’s of a Commuter Marriage: Ambivalence, Benefits, Challenges**

This section highlights the ambivalence faced by commuter couples as well as the benefits gained and challenges experienced.

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<sup>5</sup>Jalingo, the capital of Taraba state, is characterised by poor funding (Economic Confidential 2016) and a lack of an accountable government like many states in Nigeria. It is a newer state than Plateau, Plateau was created in 1976 while Taraba was created in 1991, these factors may account for lack of proper government functioning amenities, making Jos more attractive.

### 5.3.1 Ambivalence

Mabry, Giarrusso & Benston (2004) describe ambivalence as an occurrence that is ‘troubling’ to the commuter couple being that family relationships typically involve both positive and negative sentiments such as affection and resentment as well as conflicting feelings, motivations and thoughts especially where social norms, roles, statues and family values are at variance. Commuting couples have feelings of ambivalence when they consider their relationship status. Some ambivalent feelings of commuters are noted below:

*Sometimes I feel like I’m in prison period, I think of the best way to make the best of this seeming inconvenience... I think of John Bunyan, who wrote The Pilgrim’s Progress and say to myself, I can sing...it’s just a way of consoling myself ... I like it because, no disturbance from children or wife, that could disturb my creativity, I could write songs, I try to use that period to think, be alone, these are some of my best periods (Samson M AC).*

*Sometimes when you are lonely, things begin to cross my mind, why is it that even my wife has not come to visit and see where I am... so that I’ll even know if we should be here or not... I miss them, and I think I should not even be there at all...I don’t think there is anything I like at all about being apart, but sometimes it gives you the freedom and time to do certain things, for example I’m writing a book and I have the time to do that but sometimes I say, I don’t need this time, let me go and be with my family (Emmanuel M AC).*

Isaac has similar conflicting thoughts to that of Emmanuel and Samson. He feels there is nothing he likes about the commuter relationship and goes on to say it gives him time to focus on certain goals he wants to achieve.

*Sometimes I think of putting off the career to be at home and watch my children grow, sometimes I think it’s not worth it ... I would like to take care of me and my family, not worry about the rest of the country and trying to make a difference (Isaac M AC).*

It is interesting that it was the men’s accounts that depicted the most feelings of ambivalence. Connidis & McMullin (2002, p.564) note that at different points of the life course, family ties could involve more or less ambivalence. This occurrence may be because it is the men who are

mostly on the commuter trail, having had to leave their wives in the house of primary residence due to decisions they undoubtedly made for the sake of the family. This is alluded in section 5.6.1 where it was determined that the pursuits of financial gain for the family is usually a sacrifice for the family and not a sacrifice of the family, in which case the heads of the family (husbands) are mostly involved in the mission.

### **5.3.2 Benefits of Commuting**

These factors are the positive feelings that commuters attach to commuting. Lee (2015) recounts some positive factors associated with commuting such as acquiring economic leverage, having leisure time, especially for commuter wives, in which to pursue things that are of interest to them without spousal interference. A strong gendered division was found in this case.

#### **5.3.2.1 Quality of Life in Certain Geographical Locations**

In the section above, the reasons why people commute was discussed. The perceived benefits of commuting to some particular states or residing in some particular locations for their unique favours and flavours such as quality of life and serenity are explored in this subsection. Glotzer & Federlein (2007) assert that leveraging commuting into quality of life enjoyed may be another motivation for couples to live apart. Some participants speak about how the places they are stationed at have been beneficial, making the commuter experience more bearable.

*I like the school the children are in Lagos. I love the performance. When they got to Lagos, it was almost difficult for her to cope because the school in Jos was not that good... the few schools here in Jos that can give the quality of education my children are receiving in Lagos is too expensive (Henry M AC).*

In Henry's case, he took advantage of the commute to boost the educational level of his children and see better results in their academic performance than when they were schooling in Jos. Jos may have better amenities and facilities compared to younger states such as Taraba (Jalingo is the capital), but when compared to big cities and older states like Lagos (Nigeria's first capital city and now the commercial capital), better schools and amenities are available. Also, generally, the public schools in Nigeria have poor funding and infrastructure due to the long history of misappropriation of funds and negligence on the part of the different ruling administrations to address proper education in Nigeria, this has made the private school sector in Nigeria more

viable. With the private sector being so competitive, private schools have the incentive to offer good education with various kinds of curricula. All the participants' children attend private schools.

Omede (2015) describes how the public schools in Nigeria failed to live up to their profession due to lack of infrastructure and prevalent union strikes, mainly for wages. The private schools, some owned by mission organizations and some by individuals as a service to humanity or some other reason, kindled the hope of Nigerians by reviving the value of education and ensuring quality delivery of academic activities. Yet, some of the private schools charge very high tuition rates and employ unqualified or underqualified staff.

*I like the children's school and sense of community and Jos is stress free compared to Lagos schools, that have a different mentality, it's like they are not real, too much effizy (Nigerian slang for flamboyance, showiness and extravagance) that does not warrant anything and when I think about those things I don't like, then some schools don't have sanity ... but I still miss Lagos. I grew up there and it has become part of me, I like Lagos and when I came here, (I thought to myself that) this place is good, because, after work, you still have a life after work. Unlike Lagos, where you come back from work stressed and you are thinking of the next day's stress again, it's like stress to stress, stress to stress, but here, you have after work hours, a life after work, you can go to the gym and come back and here, you can actually have time with your family and I like that aspect here. If my husband was here, I'm sure I won't be feeling like that and both of us will be here with the children (Chizo F EC).*

Even though she had to take a cut back on her job, Chizo testifies that she likes Jos and the children's school. The school Chizo refers to, is an American missionary school established in 1942, which has maintained its standards and values amidst Nigeria's failing educational system. She is also glad to be able to keep fit and have quality family time due to less traffic congestion. Big cities like Lagos are notorious for heavy traffic, which makes commuters dread the long hours it takes to get from one end of the city to another.

### 5.3.2.2 Focus on Work, Goals and Leisure

Participants mention how a commuting lifestyle can help them focus on work and other goals, leading to satisfaction and fulfilment of accomplishing tasks.

*I guess everyone is independent, no one feels like they are abandoning, they are held back or abandoning dreams, I'm fulfilled, no one feels that they are being cheated, or waiting around for the other to fulfil their dream, like I'm just at home, supporting you, everyone is satisfied, everyone is fulfilled(Uzo F AC).*

*They (his family) are not really a disturbance, but I can do things as the house is quiet, my son is not jumping on me ... sometimes I just want to be alone .... I'm in Delta for a reason... It's putting me in a position to think and develop strategy for better financial gains (Emmanuel M AC).*

Emmanuel testifies that his family is not a disturbance to him, but he can get things done better when there is less distraction, giving him the opportunity to think strategically for better financial rewards.

*Sometimes I don't feel like eating or taking care of myself and I know that if my wife was there, the story will be different. I am really a solitary person, I try to use that period to think, be alone, these are some of my best periods, I like it because, no disturbance from children or wife, that could disturb my creativity, I should be able though to process my thoughts in spite of them being around... (Samson M AC)*

Samson says that being alone usually gives him the opportunity to think and be creative; he values this as an artist. He knows that he should be able to process his thoughts when his family is around, but he is content with these intermittent times of being away from the family.

His wife also treasures the time he is away as she has two small children, she is grateful for an opportunity to do some relaxing things for herself.

*That period when he is not around is a beautiful time to pray, study and relax... I do those things I've not done, use the opportunity to do what I want(Dinah F AC).*

The men's narratives seem to suggest that they can focus on working during workweeks and focus on family during times at home. As the male participants do not have the children living with them, they have time to focus entirely on work and their own interests, so they are on one

track at work and on another track when they come home. There is thus a clear separation for these men between work life and family life in commuter relationships.

### **5.3.2.3 Meal Preparation From the Perspective of Wives**

The women talk a lot about not having the daily burden of preparing a meal for their husbands. This is one of the main household tasks they feel some relief from when their husbands are not around. The husbands (see below) however, commented on the absence of someone who would prepare good and balanced meals for them.

*Mine is a very selfish, like I don't have to worry about what to cook, who has eaten ...there were times that he would come, and I would feel like, I have to live in the kitchen now, but if that was part of my life, I wouldn't be thinking it was odd (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth discloses that when her husband would come home, it would seem like she was constantly in the kitchen as she cooked for him daily, in other words not being in a commuter relationship, she would be so used to it, she might not have experienced it as a problem. She is thus re-evaluating gendered expectations due to her experiences in a commuter relationship.

*As a wife, you cook, my husband likes fresh food, I think that's the part I enjoy now, I don't have to cook 24 hours a day. You need to cook for the children and cook up healthy meals for them, but not so much stress, if my husband were to be around, he'll invite 100 people to the house and I have to do so much and all that but that much has reduced (Tina F EC).*

Although Tina has to cook nutritious meals for the children, this is far less stressful and she does not have to cook for his guests as well.

Other participants added:

*When he is not around, we cook whatever we want to eat because he is a picky eater (Dinah F AC).*

*I don't have to worry about going home to cook for him and his little needs, basically it's me and baby... so I really can't say I have complaints (Sratu F AC).*

Allen & Sachs (2007, p.1) opine that ‘today, in most societies, women continue to carry the responsibility for mental and manual labour of food provision—the most basic labour of care... and bear the responsibility for nourishing others...’. The women in this study realise that one of their duties as good wives is to cook for the family and they have embraced this role, but they are relieved that they do not have to cook every day. Cooking for your husband as a Nigerian wife, is as a big task that requires thought, detail and preparation. When cooking meals, women try to avoid repeating the same dish, they also try to cook fresh meals from scratch. Some meals are prepared specifically according to what the husband likes to eat or wants to eat. This means that everyone at home eats that one meal that the husband desires as it is not often prudent or possible to cook a different meal for every member of the family. In many cases, the wife does not cook her own meal, what she wants to eat due to her consideration of other members of the family. On the other hand, in cooking a meal specifically for the husband, the wife may have to make a different meal for other members of the family as some households have a ‘father only meal’, in terms of presentation and preparation. Some husbands are on a dietary plan, so the wives have to prepare the meals accordingly.

Some households may have a house help<sup>6</sup> (domestic worker) helping out in the kitchen, but these house helps may not cook for the family, especially for the husband as some husbands do not want any meal at home except that prepared by the wife. Also, since many of these house helps are female, some women are wary of allowing the worker an inroad to their husband’s affections by not allowing them to cook for their families, but only helping in the meal preparation such as washing and cutting vegetables or pounding crayfish and pepper. The fetish about cooking for the husband by the wife could be likened to the duty and desire of keeping your husband, as the art and act of being the one cooking for your husband is a wifely duty much like sleeping with him (Darkwah & Ampofo 2008; Aribisala 2016).

Another reason why commuter wives are glad to be relieved of cooking is that some Nigerian dishes are difficult and time consuming to prepare. Some ingredients have to be bought on a daily basis as they perish quickly and cannot be preserved due to frequent power outages. This means going to the market and then coming home to prepare the meal almost on a daily basis. It

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<sup>6</sup>House help is a word generally used by Nigerians to refer to domestic workers, other words are house boy or house girl to be more specific or nanny (if she is also caring for children). The term house boy/ house girl has been perceived by some employers as derogatory and not befitting for some age groups especially if they are an older domestic worker.

also means being very prudent with the money at your disposal as you will always need cash to be able to stop by the market and purchase ingredients for the meal. The burden of meal preparation as well as making sure there are enough ingredients to prepare the next meal lies with wives. To be free of this burden, even if only during the working week, is welcomed by the female participants.

#### **5.3.2.4 Meal Preparation and Healthy Lifestyle**

Where women were recounting the joy of not having to cook elaborate daily meals, men reported they were not eating properly because they did not have their wives' delicious cooking every day (section 5.4.3.1), this husband had this to say:

*I love food, but I can do without, my best food is indomie (instant noodles) and sausage or egg, I get excited when I see her cooking the good dishes, but I can default to my easy indomie which I can do for myself... now I've developed a healthy lifestyle so I make a stir fry for dinner and go to bed, when I'm at work in Abuja, I live a healthier lifestyle and in Jos, I gorge (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac says he can make do when it comes to eating by preparing instant two-minute noodles with sausages and eggs when he is away and "eat properly" when he is in Jos. Fuller (2010) asserts that commuting married men actually have better self-reported health compared to married men living with their wives and this statement corroborates with Isaac's report. For Isaac, the absence of regular hearty meals benefited him by forcing him to follow a healthier lifestyle.

### **5.3.3 Challenges of Commuter Marriages**

Participants mentioned different challenges and what they do not particularly like about the commuting experience. Following the previous discussion, the challenge of not eating properly from the men's perspective is further highlighted here. Other challenges identified were communication and bonding, which will be discussed in chapter 7 with other marriage practices in order to provide a holistic view.

#### **5.3.3.1 Eating Patterns**

Eating patterns of commuters are discussed below as one of the challenges of a commuter marriage.



*I don't eat for enjoyment, only to survive, not like when she was around, and I asked her to cook for me. (Henry M AC)*

Henry reminisces about the time when he was with his wife and he could ask her to prepare a meal he enjoyed eating. Now, he says he does not eat for pleasure but eats whatever is available in order to survive.

*I don't even eat all the time because of the wahala (Nigerian slang for stress or trouble) of cooking, so I just manage and tell myself, it's just for a time (Emmanuel M AC).*

Similarly, Samson says: *Sometimes I don't like the fact that I have to make my meals because I don't like eating out (Samson M AC).*

The challenges around eating properly were presented mainly by the husbands in this study. Where the women are grateful to not cook elaborate meals every day, the men do not like the idea of not eating well. The fact that commuting men state that they have bad eating habits mean that they need their wives to help them to eat properly. Poor eating habits could be detrimental to their health since not eating properly could lead to poor health conditions such as ulcers and improper weight gain, which invariably could lead to other bigger problems such as heart problems. Medical practitioners warn that inappropriate weight gain could lead to heart problems. (Dolansky, Hawkins, Schaefer, Gunstad, Sattar, Redle, Vehovec, Josephson, Moore, & Hughes 2017).

The strong gendered division of labour within households is thus seen in these comments on food preparation. Where male participants have to “learn to cook” now that they live on their own, female participants are relieved of cumbersome meal preparation. Ironically, both male and female participants are preparing “easy meals” regularly when apart, but the expectation is that when they are together, the women will fall back into the role of sole cook and the preparation of intricate meals. Being apart, thus necessarily leads to more flexible gendered household labour, but once they are together again, the rigid division of labour is immediately again in place and seemingly not questioned by either party.

#### **5.3.3.2 Dangers on the Road and Transport logistics**

Another identified challenge with being in a commuter marriage are the hazards and constraints involved in travelling. This is discussed below.

*The risk of being on the road is a major one, the accident I had was because I was going to see them [his family] as we had a wedding and there was a job I was to do, so I decided to do the two at once. If I had rested before going... but the anxiety of wanting to beat time, now the car is condemned (Henry M AC).*

Henry recalls how he wanted to see his family and did not have time to rest before a particular journey because he wanted to make up some time (the trip from Jos to Lagos could take up to twelve hours or more by road). This resulted in a motor crash that wrecked his car and cost him a lot of money to fix.

*Nigerian roads can be dangerous... there are times when we travel, I separate the family, I don't go with all the children or don't go with them at all because of the dangers on the road (Tina F EC).*

Tina separates her family into two different cars when travelling by road, which is the only way to get to where her husband is, from Jos. She does this in order to avoid whatever dangers there may be on the way, be it mishaps that can happen to the car because of bad roads, armed robbers or accidents.

*It was so hard to come from Jalingo because it was about 10/11 hours of reasonable driving, two full tanks of petrol... to come one way and the stress of the driving plus the bad roads and if you don't have more than a weekend, you know it's not worth it. You have to be able to get permission to leave on a Thursday for it to make sense and there was no airport, we just got an airport... if you need to leave to Jos from Abuja, it's an added cost by road because there is no direct flight and the flight is every other day and you could miss it or it could be cancelled, but if I could humble myself and come by bus it's cheaper...but then you know I'm a politician, if people see you in the bus, it's not too great for your image... you have to make the practical choices.... It's also stressful physically and the risk of being on the road is high, armed robbers, accidents, the disadvantages far outweigh the advantages, the risk on the road is high(Isaac M AC).*

Isaac laments the various aspects that make travel laborious in Nigeria. He mentions fuel scarcity, the poor public transport system, the distance between the two locations that makes spending a weekend with his family an uphill task as a good part of the weekend is spent on the

journey and the cost saving techniques that make the trip not worth his while. His status as a politician is specifically mentioned where expectations associated with his career and socio-economic class prevent him from taking a practical decision such as travelling by bus.

Nigerian roads are notorious for road accidents and armed robbery attacks as well as the cost of transportation which will be further discussed in the next chapter. The Nigerian transportation infrastructure, including the roads, is not well maintained and hence the roads become accident prone and death traps. The Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), the government agency in charge of safety on the roads report that in 2015, 64,394 people were involved in road accidents and 5,440 people lost their lives as a result of a road accident (Federal Road Safety Corps, 2017). Travelling by road can thus be quite challenging, especially if you have to travel consistently and over long distances.

Public transportation is cheaper, but not convenient in Nigeria. This is again due to the collapse of public institutions in the country as a result of corruption inherent in the system making transportation difficult. The private transport sector is also taking over this sector. Poor road networks also make travelling a hassle. Using your own car may be better, but then you have to deal with the wear and tear on the car, your health and the stress of driving the distance as well the financial implications of making the journey.

The aviation sector also has its challenges. Not all states in Nigeria have an airport and where they do, flights do not operate to all states in Nigeria on a daily basis. For example, Isaac and Chizo narrate how in their different states, there is only one flight that lands and takes off daily. Actually, in Isaac's case, the flight is every other day and only goes to the Federal capital in Abuja, it is expensive, and you may miss it due to the timing and other factors, this could definitely add to the challenges already faced by commuting partners. Ortega, Abdullah and Roslan (2014) detail that travelling time add negative challenges to commuting couples.

It is thus clear that the specific local context of the poor transport infrastructure adds to the pressures experience by commuter couples.

### **5.3.3.3 Anxiety and Pressure**

A third challenge identified by commuter couples is the anxiety and pressure they feel when their spouses are away. This is discussed below.

*Sometimes, you feel tired, you are worrying about your spouse on the other side, what is happening to him, has he eaten today...you do a lot of thinking now, you do lot of asking yourself, is this person okay or have I forgotten anything and all that. I think, it's some kind of pressure that you could avoid, if you were in one place(Tina F EC).*

Tina talks about being tired and worrying about your spouse: whether he has eaten, how he is doing and coping. The constant worrying is not good.

*These children are my main problem. I was so devastated yesterday because Simon was sick and that puts some emotional pressure on me. We were at a church function, our annual thanksgiving service when Simon started to be sick (having a sickle cell crisis), he started crying and I was trying to get him home in time for his medicine. I left my daughter with my sister who brought her home after church. If my husband was around, it won't be so bad, we share the burden together... I pray that God will help me with them. I'm just thankful for everything. There was a time, I had to take them to the hospital on a motorcycle (a form of public transport) because I didn't have a car. I would carry one and back one(the act of backing involves putting an infant/child on one's back and tying the child securely to oneself with a wrapper or cloth)one. God's grace was available, and I was coping even though he was not around. Some people expect me to just be lean (lose weight due to the pressure of looking after sick children) but I'm doing well. I leave it to God. I couldn't even eat when Simon started yesterday, I was so distraught. I can't explain what happened. I feel terrible at times, I couldn't talk, I was wondering why this would happen (Rebekah F EC).*

Rebekah had a unique situation where she had twin 8-year old boys<sup>7</sup> who both had sickle cell anaemia (SS). Sickle cell anaemia is an inherited form of anaemia — a condition in which there are not enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate oxygen throughout the body. Rosen, Debaun, Strunk, Redline, Seicean, Craven, Gavlak, Wilkey, Inusa, Roberts & Goodpaster (2014), opine that some of the complications of sickle cell anaemia are increased pain, greater risk of central nervous system events, cognitive dysfunction, and history of acute chest syndrome. There is no cure for most people with sickle cell anaemia however, treatments can relieve pain and help prevent further problems associated with the disease.

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<sup>7</sup>The twin who was sick at the time of the interview passed away in March 2016.

This woman had the added burden of caring for sick children as well as the daily burden of caring for the house and playing a triple role. Rebekah has some days when the children will be so sick that they would spend many nights in the hospital. The amount of money they spent on medical care was astronomical. They had a series of medical tests, there was a time the twins both had surgery on their legs because they could not walk. As a result of this, his brother started to walk while Simon still had difficulties. She told about a time when her husband was not around, and the children had a crisis. At the time, she could not drive and did not have anyone living with her, she had to take a public motorcycle, (popularly called *okada* in Nigeria) the only means of transportation available at the time, to the hospital. She put one of the boys on her back and the motorcycle operator put one of the boys in the front with him. This was a dangerous ride and shows some of the ways she and her family have dealt with the anxiety and pressure of having sick children.

This case illustrates how a stressful situation, such as chronically sick children, can become almost unbearable when in a commuter relationship. Landesman & Seward (2013) note correctly that the absence of a partner requires family restructuring. Having to adjust to staying apart from their partners could lead to stress and anxiety.

#### **5.4 Reflections of Participants on the Commuting Lifestyle**

Participants look inward to reflect on what they think the commuting relationship has cost them. Some participants refer to the commuting situation as a sacrifice which must be done for the good of the family, some female participants liken situation to being widows, still other participants compare their relationship with couples who live together. The discussions are reported below.

##### **5.4.1 Commuting as a Sacrifice**

Some participants reflect on and discuss commuting as a sacrifice below.

*The family is still young, and I feel that for every family, there is always a time of sacrifice, you either pay that price now or later, and I think it's always better to pay it when you are starting, not in your old age, now it may not be palatable, but this is a learning, rough period, sometimes when you are together, the atmosphere is tense, and you just want to travel. If any of us has to be away in order to gain some aspiration or to get to where we are going, it's a price worth paying, life is not all about enjoying it*

*all the way, we need to also develop muscle to cope and train ourselves to develop coping skills because there is a price ahead. I expect a better future, but we might not always be together. Sometimes I have a hard time even explaining this to my wife, I'm not bothered about now, but for the future, what price can we pay... I tell intending couples to expect it because you can't determine the path to your destiny. I don't think there is any ideal, it's a mirage, television and soap operas are just fiction, families are not always together, look around, which family is not separated at some point in time? Families that are going places have a price to pay, those who are expecting big things... I can cope because sometimes, I tell myself, it's for the good of everybody(Samson M AC).*

*I think sometimes, from what I've seen, I've looked at a number of marriages, I've discovered that at some point in some marriages, I won't say all, this comes up. For some people, it's in their early stage for some it's later, some its midway due to one reason or the other, pursuing things, getting involved in life. It comes up. If it comes to you, you manage it the best as you can. I don't believe it's going to be forever, that's not the plan, it's not supposed to be forever, it's just a phase, that's the way I see it. So, let that see you through...Like this lady in her 60's who has gone to Abuja because of her pension and she left her husband, an old man, here to fend for himself, I'm just saying at some point it happens...At some point someone decides in old age, I want to go for master's(A higher educational qualification), for that one year, they must be apart, the man is in his fifties or sixties and he will start eating indomie (instant noodles) at that stage, my point is it's just for a while and you will work it out (Uzo F AC).*

Uzo's comments mirror Samson's thoughts in that she reports having observed some couples who part at some point in their marriage. In her opinion, it is best the couple part for economic reasons or to achieve certain goals when they are younger and stay together when they are older. She uses the term 'manage' to suggest that couples will have to make the best of the commuting situation when they find themselves in it, because it will not last forever. The participants try to cast their commuter marriages as conventional – an expected sacrifice that manifests as a commuter relationship – even though they are aware of the difficulties that accompany it.

*I'll advice that the time apart should not be too long and where sacrifices need to be made, make them (Ruth F EC).*

*Younger couples should not try it, no matter what because, there is always a sacrifice to pay in marriage, one of them should pay the sacrifice to be together, especially, younger ones (Chizo F EC).*

Chizo, married for seventeen years, opines that younger couples should not embark on the commute and be ready to sacrifice in their early days so as to meet their goals as a couple

In discussing the theme of sacrificing for the good of the family, it would seem that all participants agree that the onset of the marriage is the best time to be apart in order to pursue economic and career goals. This is because timing makes all the difference and engaging in a commuter marriage earlier on in the marriage will mean that couples rest from the stress of the commute and enjoy their labours in a later stage of the marriage. The life course theory discussed in chapter 2 portrays family development from a historical point of view and asserts that changes in family statuses through the life course are affected by the timing of events.

Another subtle factor is the fact that the husband as head of the house and breadwinner is the one expected to do what is necessary to make the financial future of the family viable. He then should make the move while the wife manages and understands the situation they find themselves in. Herein, lays another gender dimension to the roles of individuals in a commuter marriage.

Aryee (2005) opines that in urban Nigeria, because of our collectivistic manner, sacrifice of time to pursue income-generating activities apart from the family is *a sacrifice made for the family, not a sacrifice of the family*. This is in contrast to individualistic societies where it is about personal accomplishments, and time devoted to work is about sacrificing the family. The decision to commute and working it out, is associated with achieving shared goals. In almost all the interviews, participants talked about 'sacrificing' as well as 'managing' to describe the attitude family members should have towards commuting because the situation is not to last forever and ultimately it is for the good of the family.

The commuter marriage is a transition in the life course that younger couples embark on in order to end this stage in their later years. The commuter relationship stage is marked by various

transitions such as getting a new job, getting a transfer, getting a financial break in order to buy or own a house, raising children, getting to know and understand your spouse even as the marriage is practiced; the exchange of support networks with kin and other relationships along the life course and the ultimate end of that stage in the life of the couple.

#### **5.4.2 What Does a Commuter Marriage Cost?**

Closely related to sacrifice, is the cost of the commuter marriage in terms of values which may not necessarily be quantified such as emotions and loneliness (finances in the commuter marriage are discussed in detail in chapter 7). This section chronicles the thought and perceptions of commuters with regards to the personal expenses they feel the commuter relationship has cost them.

*It's mostly the time it takes, I'm improving myself, doing school runs up and down (school runs is a Nigerian term that describes the act of taking children to and from school) and this has affected my relationship with some of my friends thinking I want to show them I have a job, or I'm married etc., but it's just that I'm stretched, and my husband is not around to help me. I don't have the time because I'm filling in the gaps, so it slows down many things (Michelle M AC).*

Michelle is convinced that the price she has to pay for a commuter relationship cost her social life, social time and development time. This is time to get other pertinent and pressing things done as she is stretched doing a post-graduate programme, working, taking care of the children and losing her friends. She might have been able to balance this social inconvenience if her husband was around to share her workload.

*If you are not careful, psychologically you begin to feel ooo, this is not there, I didn't prepare for this and all that stuff, I think it can be a burden sometimes(Tina F EC).*

Tina asserts there is a psychological cost to a commuter relationship as you very soon begin to feel cheated and unprepared for the changes and burdens it brings.

*Probably if we were together, we could have had more kids, but you think, 'do I want to put another child through that?(Ruth F EC).*

The cost of a commuter marriage to Ruth is her family size, she guesses that if she and her husband were together, they might have had another child. However, considering that the



relationship between her children and their commuting father is not that great, she wonders if she would want to put another child in the difficult situation the other children have experienced.

*My husband will always say, he wants to be with them, because of them, he wants to make the effort to come, he always tells me, he doesn't feel comfortable this is something that has gone on, for thirteen to fourteen years now and he will always say, he feels something is missing, we need to come together, as a family. My husband said to me once that he is ready to receive half of his salary if he can get a job in Jos and be closer to home because he doesn't like being away from home (Paula F EC).*

*My husband hates it, sometimes you can see that he is struggling, he wishes he could be around, there are days he will tell me that I don't know what he goes through, he will go to the office some days and feels like resigning, sometimes, he calls and I'm bathing or something and we can't talk, so ... but what can he do? He is just ready to become a man, what will he do if he comes? Will he just be looking at us? If he can't provide for us, there will still be trouble, it affects him seriously and he hates it and he's not there and really wants to be around. He has told me once that he doesn't mind receiving a pay cut to be closer to home...it's just because the economic situation is the way it is, if they had their way, they will not want to be away from the family. The jobs are not even available and what they have now, they hold on to it dearly (Michelle F AC).*

Michelle's husband shared the same sentiments as Paula's for missing family time. Their submissions about their husbands show that sometimes when couples commute it is because they do not have an economic choice and the expectation of husbands as breadwinners are entrenched in their marriage practices. Some commuters cannot afford not to commute as commuting in search of a better job and better life opportunities for the family afford the breadwinner the opportunity to play their role and the money they are currently making cannot be compared to the price they are paying to be cut off consistent family time.

*If I could afford to live with my family, it would be the first and best choice, but I can't afford it...I could get a driver... I don't want to be an aide for the rest of my political career and I won't continue here for long (Isaac AC M).*

Isaac's reflection here expresses his sacrifice for the family. Being an aide to a National Assembly member of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, his goal for now is to provide security and financial support for his family and also have a bit of free time to come home. He is willing to sacrifice earlier aspirations because he feels he cannot continue with this career path for much longer. When he says if he could afford it, he is not only talking about finances, but also the temporary loss of his goals and aspirations of being a real politician/businessman. Having a driver in Nigeria symbolizes a man of means and affluence and all that accompanies it as not everyone can afford a driver, in essence, the commuter marriage has cost him some of his personal comfort and (imagined) public regard or admiration for having a personal driver.

### 5.4.3 "I'm Lonely and Alone"

The experience of a commuting relationship entails being left alone for a couple of days or more while the spouse is pursuing work related commitments. In trying to understand this pattern, some participants liken their experience of being apart from their spouses as some form of widowhood.

*I'm going to say something very morbid, if my husband drops dead today, but that the truth of my situation, yes, I would feel bad, my children have lost a father, I've lost a husband, but life will go on, I'm used to being alone (Ruth F AC).*

*Some say people have said to me that (the commuter marriage) it's a form of training to learn how to live alone, to know how to cope in the event he is not there, and it is a way of encouraging you to be independent(Natalie F AC).*

Natalie has friends and acquaintances who have told her that her commuter marriage is like a survival boot camp that will teach her to cope in the event her husband dies.

*I hate the fact that I cannot go to places alone...in those moments, I sometimes tell myself, be grateful he is even around. What if you were a widow? The truth is that there are husbands who are there, but are not available for their wives (emotionally and otherwise) these women are 'widows' if I may say. There are couples who stay together, but the woman will do everything in the home from school runs to homework and the husband will not lift a finger, so for the fact that he is elsewhere, and he still shows concern, it's a plus (Michelle F AC).*

*I hate the fact that I can't hang out (Praise F AC).*

Praise and Michelle lament the inability to go to places alone and the fact that they cannot go out without their husband. They are not comfortable going out alone knowing that there will be many questions about where their husbands are; the societal expectation sometimes does not allow them to show up at certain places alone. The view of these participants points out that commuter marriage couples compare themselves with traditional couples who live together. Michelle's statement continues in this light, comparing her husband who is away from home and still checks on the family and the husbands who are home and not do anything to help their wives.

*This is not normal and it's not ideal. ...Sometimes, I will be at home all alone, no light, no one to talk to... It would be a different thing entirely if we lived together and I travelled for a month or two to work, but to go visit, do some work in Lagos and then come back to Jos and work is a different thing all together. Because of the financial constraints, people have to endure and do this lifestyle...No happy family or responsible person will want to run away from home or their responsibilities. Like me, I don't have any girlfriend anywhere and I believe she doesn't have a boyfriend anywhere apart from me. No one will just want to leave their spouse without a reason, except you want to run away completely (Henry M AC).*

*Most people in this type of marriage are not really willing to be in a situation like this except if the marriage has a problem (Rebekah F EC).*

*Some people think it's a way to escape but you can't escape forever... I met a guy in a taxi once, who told me that he was going to tell his wife to leave that day, I told him it was not like that and spoke to him, he came down with me and people were even thinking he was my friend and before I knew it, he was telling me that my own (situation) even better than his because I'm not in the firing squad or kitchen to take the heat (because he is not there with his wife always), but I don't see it like that (Emmanuel M AC).*

Rebekah and Emmanuel, agree with Henry and go further to liken the aspect of not living together in the commuter marriage to a marriage in crisis as when couples separate to settle marital disputes. As far as they are concerned, most people will not opt to live apart except if it is to settle a marital issue or to escape a difficult spouse. This subsection is closely related to the

one following as it juxtaposes the dynamics of why some couples seem to need space and others seem to feel lonely.

#### 5.4.4 Space

The subtheme of space was explored because participants mentioned various instances when they felt they needed some distance or their spouse needed some 'space'. The meaning of space in this discussion is viewed from different angles by husbands and wives. In the first case, the wife's view of her husband's is given:

*My husband is also a very independent person...he is a loner, happy with his gadgets... like sometimes, when the children and I were there for the holidays, you could sense that it was time to leave, he wouldn't say it, but you could sense it, 'I would like my space thank you' (Ruth F EC).*

*Somehow, I don't envy couples who have to be with each other 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, somehow, it looks like a lot of work...and you need to know you can come home to a listening ear, space or whatever. You need to know when to let him be, your husband wants to come home and watch football and no one is changing it to telemondo or zee world<sup>8</sup> (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac, after being married for five years and commuting for that long, says he feels that couples should be able to give each other some distance. Isaac has thus settled into the commuter marriage dynamics and it may be difficult to adjust if they had to live together again.

Lee (2015) states that there is a kind of independence that commuter wives face that wives who live continuously with their husbands may not understand. Wives in commuter marriages can manage their schedules and energy without the interference of their spouses, they can give their occupational careers, their undivided attention, enjoy personal leisure activities and form and extend social relationships on their own.

*I like space, so it's good for me (the commuter marriage), I want my personal space also...if he was here, I wouldn't be living with my parents so, for that, I want my personal space...It's taken us longer time to build a structure and have our personal*

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<sup>8</sup>Two channels on the popular Multi Choice (DSTV) cable television that Nigerians generally assume more women watch than men.

*home, it's taken us longer than I would have wanted because I'm sure if he was around, we would have had our own house, that's basically my issue (Saratu F AC).*

At the time of the interview, Saratu was living with her daughter in her parent's house. She does not mind living with her parents but would much rather have her own house and personal space, such that she mentions wanting their own house as her basic issue. Her desire for personal space may be for her to be able to express herself more freely as an adult. If this assertion is correct, then, Saratu's situation is in line with the argument that sometimes kin relationships can be constraining, and that social support does not work to everyone's advantage due to notions of duty and obligation (Crow & Maclean 2004). Lee (2015) also states that at times, support from families can be undermined as married women living with their parents or in-laws can be an added burden. Overall though, Saratu and her husband Isaac are grateful for her parent's support.

*I was talking to one of my friends and she said: "don't worry about it now, are you people (both of you) not going to be together for the rest of your lives?" She was like for those of them who have been together, (living continuously with the same spouse), they sometimes say (within themselves) won't you travel for one year? It's like they are wishing for that space which is not really space (Uzo F AC).*

Linda however, does not think the 'space' is something she needs:

*I don't like anything at all (about the commuter marriage) even though some people say to me, you are lucky, you don't have to worry about your husband, you can take care of yourself and have time for yourself, but I don't like it. I will be asking what type of rest and time, he doesn't disturb me and what kind of time, I know we can't be together 24 hours because of life, career, etc., but... there is no gain, if he's around, I can do anything when he is around, visit friends, do my hair, what? There is no gain (Linda F AC).*

Linda says that, contrary to people's advice, her husband does not stop her from doing anything she wants to do. She sees no advantage of their being apart and the so-called space of no gain to her. The term space can thus be indicative of wanting more physical space, but also in some cases individual freedom, even though this is not the case for all the participants.

These discussed submissions portray the feelings and reflections of participants on the effect of the commuting relationship as it affects them personally: the sacrifices they make, the loneliness they feel and their psychological and emotional longings, their interdependence and autonomy.

Lindemann (2017) opines that commuter couples simultaneously value interdependence and autonomy in their relationships. She uses the terms individualism and autonomy interchangeably to describe the spousal independence within their commuter relationship that facilitates their individual goals, where individuals indicate that they can be their own person in the marriage, casting themselves as distinct individuals whose relationships are beneficial to their individual interests. This autonomy may mean the same thing as ‘space’ which participants in this study refer to. While she uses the term interdependence to show spousal reliance on each other for everything, this may refer to the feelings of loneliness and being alone in this study. Spouses in a commuter marriage have their autonomy and interdependence intertwined.

## **5.5 Perceptions of Family and Friends**

Participants reflected on what their extended family and friends thought about the commuter relationship. The musings presented here by participants indicate that sometimes, family members and friends seem to have a somewhat negative and sometimes nonchalant attitude as to why the couple are engaged in a commuter marriage (a further look at the exchanges between kin, friends and commuter couples are discussed in chapter 9).

*Some are for, some are against, some understand, some are (saying) not for long, let this time be that you are trying to work out how you will be together, not that this is what it's going to be (Uzo F AC).*

Uzo reveals that of her family and friends, some are for the commuter relationship while others are against it. She submits that they advise her to work out a more permanent arrangement during this time so that they do not end up a commuter couple forever.

*I don't think anybody likes the idea that you are apart, and separated from your spouse. After a while I stopped getting those reactions from people after a while, people stopped talking and asking me, after a while, it becomes necessary some people were concerned, but due to the crisis situation in Maiduguri, I can't bring my family to a place like this, because of the crisis situation. It became necessary to put food on the*

*table. I got advice when the crisis started becoming serious, that people said stay here and leave the family in Jos for safety sake let your family be in Jos. The concern people show or seem to show puts some kind of pressure on you, because you don't want to be seen as indifferent or not listening, it's not the best and it's not ideal, I can't remember anyone telling me it's good for your family to remain apart (Samson M AC).*

Samson's family and friends do not like the idea that they do not live together, they only show concern because he lives in crisis prone area, where attacks by the dreaded Boko Haram sect happen spontaneously. According to him, no one in his network of family and friends has told him it was good for the family to remain apart. Even though he says the concern people show, puts a certain pressure on him.

*Family and friends didn't like it, but they got tired of asking, because it's like hearing the same thing over and over again they kept saying, won't you move, won't you move, in the early days.... My family of origin was very close-knit, and we were always together so when this came up with my husband, it was quite strange, my parents were against it and I must say, it has taken its toll on the marriage, I couldn't understand it (Ruth F EC).*

She goes on to explain:

*And when I took it up with my husband and also, I didn't like it...My husband came from a polygamous house and it was not an issue to him, he said to me, he didn't understand my problem, I didn't have to fight with co-wives and do all the politics of a polygamous home and he was bringing food home and he didn't understand why I wanted more and I didn't understand how he was normal like that (how he could not understand why she wanted more). It really caused a few issues and take its toll on the marriage initially. Now those things I'm used to and I don't take them personally anymore, I understand, it's a function of his background, I understand this is who he is, and it doesn't make me miserable anymore (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth, coming from a close-knit family reports that her family thought it was strange that she and her husband were living apart and her parents objected to the arrangement. This disagreement with her family, not liking the idea of their living apart and her husband not understanding why

she did not appreciate the fact that she was well cared for by him, in terms of what he thought was best for her, put a toll on their marriage.

This perception of family and friends is also reported by Tina: *'My mum especially feels that because of the family I need to get a transfer and join my husband'* (Tina F EC). Tina's mum is wary of families that are separated for whatever reason. She feels that families ought to be together and whatever sacrifice it will take, should be applied. She explains (chapter 7 section 7.3.4) that her parents experienced the pain of an extramarital affair and that is the reason her mum is adamant that Tina and her husband be together. Her mum's influence may have been a reason she transferred from a job earlier in their marriage in which she was the commuting spouse.

Bunker et al (1992) asserts that public views of the commuter marriage are usually pessimistic. The underlying assumption is that couples who engage in commuter marriages are doomed to split because they open doors for infidelity, lack of trust and other vices. Viers & Prouty (2001) are of the view that dual-career couples have always had to be pioneers for alternative types of relationships. This could create increased stress as couples may lack role models or support from others for their relationship and work choices.

## **5.6 Ending the Journey**

Participants were asked when they thought the commute would end. Some couples put a time frame to it as they strongly believe the commute will not last forever, but others said simply: *I don't know* (Saratu F AC).

Saratu's husband (Isaac) continues in another interview saying:

*I may not be able to end the commute abruptly, but I hope to get to a place of affluence where I can come intermittently...I want my family to stay back in Jos* (Isaac M AC).

Isaac was interviewed a year after his wife (Saratu) and he emphatically stated that he wanted his family to stay back in Jos due to the various reasons discussed above. This may mean that the family will be a commuter family for a long time.

*I'm not sure... I've encouraged him to look towards academics as a field of work, I think for it to end, I will have to push my husband because he takes his time and I'm the pushy one* (Lumya F AC).



Lumya also says she is also not certain when the commuting relationship will end unlike Isaac and Saratu who seems to have taken a stand as a couple. Since Lumya portrays herself as “the pushy one” in their marriage, she feels she would have to help her husband make career choices that will end the commuter part of their relationship.

*Initially, I was thinking by one year, we would have sorted it out but now, one year has passed and it's the second year, but we don't intend for it to be forever. The future is like we'll be together soon (Uzo F AC).*

Uzo expresses melancholy as she acknowledges that as a couple, they thought they would only be commuting for a year and now, the year has gone by. She is optimistic that they will be together soon as they do not intend to commute forever. The temporary aspect of a commuter relationship is often repeated between couples, but in some cases the commuting relationship can carry on for years:

*As you get older you get used to it and initially we thought it won't last forever, but it has now been twenty-two years...I'm apprehensive about that living together because the children are all grown and no excuse for us to live apart anymore... When I move to Lagos, am I going to get a job as I am not business inclined? Who hires almost 50-year olds? I'm independent, he's independent, it will be like a new marriage again. (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth's consideration of her age is hinged on the societal norms which are age and gender related, giving guidelines on how to behave and what to expect according to gender. When using a gendered life course perspective as a lens, it becomes clear that women are especially likely to experience work and family stereotypes (Moen 2016). This accounts for her apprehension to leave for Lagos, realizing she may not get a job due to her age and maybe sex. Ruth gives the impression that she would soon move to Lagos to join her husband and it was likely to happen in the next few months. However, at the time of writing up these findings, she had not moved yet, she was worried about moving to Lagos and starting all over after a long period of being apart with very few times of visits in between.

*I am hoping that within the next three years, everything comes to an end. I work in a place where I have a bond to stay with them for the next three to five years. It's pressure for both of us, cause my husband will like a situation where we can pay it off.*

*I am seriously hoping that within the next three years, this commuting thing can stop*  
(Tina F EC).

Tina had previously commuted, but then her husband was with their two children and she was working outside Jos and coming home on weekends. This experience and the end of that cycle of commuting makes her hopeful that this cycle will also end.

*I don't see the end of this because in his workplace, a number of states are under him and at work, and his department has some logistic issues that will not allow for him to be transferred back to Jos soon* (Rebekah F EC).

*Because of his age, it will be a challenge, he won't be able to interview for a new job now, so I see us starting a new business based in Jos and he will move back and that is how it will end. There has to be a sacrifice somewhere, even this business I'm talking about, it's taking a risk, what if it does not work? From getting a monthly salary, to working out a salary, it's quite a risk and a sacrifice*(Paula F EC).

It is clear that in the cases of established couples as the above cases, age becomes a more important factor to consider. Paula assumes that due to her husband's age, he will not be able to apply for a new job, in which case he will most likely come back to Jos just before he reaches retirement and they will start a new business. She understands that there are risks to take and sacrifices to be made in leaving a secure job and starting a new business but she says, all of life is a risk and a sacrifice.

It would seem the established couples (Ruth, Tina and Paula) see a more concrete end in sight and have a contingency plan to end it soon. However, at the time of writing the findings (a few months after the interviews were held), Emmanuel, one of the adjusting couples, was the only participant who had ended his commuting status. During the interview, he had thought it would take some time, but it took about ten months after the interview before he was back in Jos fulltime. The birth of his twin sons and an accelerated transfer contributed to bringing the commuting to an end.

Couples also reflected on ending the journey and the following excerpts from the interviews also contains some advice on how to end the commuter relationship. Tina and Ruth, both established couples having been married for more than fifteen years, advise couples to set a time limit to

their commuter marriage and have an iron clad agreement with witnesses that you trust into ending the journey (see also advice below). This advice is borne out of their experience of having been commuter wives for a long time and their perceptions of the hassles they have passed through and their wish for others in the same situation not to necessarily pass through. In Ruth's case for example, she regrets that it has virtually cost them their marriage and her husband his relationship with the children:

*If you must, have an iron clad agreement, tell your pastor, your lawyer, whoever, this is the situation, whether we make it or not after x no of years, we are coming back together, otherwise, it's so easy to drift apart and it takes a lot of work to regain lost ground (Ruth F EC).*

*There are situations where people cannot help it and have to separate, but there must always be a time limit to these things. If not, I don't see how it helps families, it can be counterproductive, you are trying to make money for the family and at that same time, you are losing out... When people have a time limit before them, they can bear certain things but when there is no time to a project, you get tired at a point and whatever it is that you are doing, looks goalless... (Tina F EC)*

Lee (2015) suggests that time apart for commuter couples in Korea could be less than two years or more than five years and that many couples reunite within several years. This may mean that commuting is either really temporary or otherwise it becomes a way of life in which the couples becomes settled. In this study, the only couple that ended their commute during the course of this research commuted for almost three years. I find that the adjusting couples (couples married for less than 10 years) are more likely to think and hope that their commute will end soon, while it may not end in the near future as they desire and envisage it to be.

Rabe (2001) found that commuter couples were not willing to commute indefinitely, this hope in the temporary nature of the commuter marriage served as a type of coping mechanism for the duration of the commuting relationship. To buttress this, Tina(F EC) says that *when people have a time limit, they can bear certain things.*

The established couples and those who have commuted for more than two years are more resigned to their fate and do not really see the commute ending soon. The other established couples seem to be settled in their ways which may not be conducive to ending the commute.

The adjusting couples are certain it will end very soon, this is their hope, but ending a commuter marriage may not be so easy and may take longer to achieve than anticipated. This is especially true when couples have been away from each other for a while and have developed a comfortable routine, have minor children and have prioritised the children's schooling and other family considerations.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The findings in this chapter examined the commuting experience of participants in the research. Literature from various scholars was used to shed more light on findings. Men and women's views as well as the stage of marriage, be it adjusting or established, were given consideration when analysing various responses to certain phenomena. Most importantly, this chapter provides some answers to the research questions asked in chapter 1, section 1.3, specifically, how being a commuter couples affects the marital relationship. More answers are discussed in the following chapters.

There are many possible variants of couples who live apart (Gerstel & Gross 1983) and there are also various motivations for couples to live apart (Glutzer & Federlein 2007). Couples who live apart in Jos demonstrate the validity of these statements. Couples in this study show that they do not live apart only because of a wife's voluntary and committed participation in her chosen career and both spouses pursuing a career at the same time (that makes it possible for them to choose an alternative living arrangement if need be) but also because they believe they do not have much choice in the matter. The economic situation in the country dictates that both incomes are necessary for a growing family. Commuting avails them the opportunity to provide a better standard of living for their families, especially with the lack of meaningful and gainful employment in some geographical areas in Nigeria. Some may even be underemployed and take the job some distances away from their spouses or stay in underemployed positions so as to be able to make ends meet.

When looking at how commuting affects gendered life courses, it was found that commuter couples engage in alternative gender experiences because they are forced to take up tasks that are usually associated with being male or female (as can be seen in the examples of food preparation above). They thus experience a rupture in their normative gendered expectations but it does not lead to permanent change in gendered expectations as they revert to their old roles once they are

together again. Some female participants related that they have more free time now that they do not have to cook such elaborate meals whilst others feel that they have less time due to more time spend on the road.

Commuter couples show that they harness the agency available to them across the life course. Hitlin et al (2015), posits that agency is not only captured in personal control, but in expectations and optimism for a positive outcome in the choices they make. This is very relevant to the couples in this study as they make use of all resources at their disposal to structure their life course. The ability to come regularly to the primary home, the confidence to go through a commuter marriage with the hope of ending it at some point as well as counting the cost of a commuter relationship, all show the harmony of agency and linked lives in as a motivational force in the family life of commuter couples.

It is also pertinent to note that just as starting the commuting relationship led to a turning point in the life course of the couples. The end of the commute also marks a turning point for couples who are able to bring their commuter relationship to an end as some families never get to end the journey. Lindemann (2017) reports that commuter couples may not go back to picking up from where they left off at the start of their journey. Ruth's family is an example, she may not have to live continuously with her husband again and with their children are grown up and independent, the children may not need to live with either parents, as they are likely to move out of home and start their own lives. Families that are able to live together again will learn to adapt to the changes that will arise, such as the women cooking more frequently for husbands as opposed to when they were living apart.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **FINANCES IN A COMMUTER MARRIAGE**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter gave a description of commuter couples in Jos and an insight into why the commuter relationship was embarked upon and how this routine impacts on some aspects of their marriage as well as perceived benefits and challenges of the commuter marriage was explored. This chapter aims to describe how commuter couples spend their money and what they spend it on; it also seeks to further answer how the commuting nature of a couple's relationship affects their marriage. The analysis in this chapter also gives a gendered perspective of the financial implications of a commuter marriage and the expenses it incurs. Fig. 2 (see chapter 4) identified how the research questions were answered and how the themes/ chapter headings were arrived at.

#### **6.2 What Commuter Couples Spend their Money on**

The commuter marriage is an expensive venture for many reasons such as travel costs, living expenses, including “two house rents” and housekeeping, phone bills and entertainment. Participants talked a great deal about their spending and expenses. Discussions in the following subsections include overt and covert financial implications of a commuter relationship as presented by couples in this study.

##### **6.2.1 Two-House Rents**

“Two house rents” and “maintaining two houses” were a recurring answer to the biggest expenses among participants (see narratives below) especially adjusting couples who do not own houses yet. The socio demographic profile of the participants shows that established couples and those who had been married for more than nine years owned their homes in at least one of the commuting locations, usually the primary residence.

*We are maintaining two houses and Jos is cheaper, for example, we are paying N120,000 (one hundred and twenty thousand naira<sup>9</sup>) annually in Jos, we are paying N240,000 (two hundred and forty thousand naira) annually in Adamawa where he is, so you see the big difference? (Paula, F AC).*

Paula highlights the disparity in house rents between her house and her husband's and it is ironic that her husband, who is living alone, is paying more for his accommodation than the accommodation for her and the children.

*I have to pay house rents and both are due the same time. I paid Lagos, last month, and I asked the Jos landlord to give me till next month to pay (Henry, M AC).*

Not being able to pay the house rent for two places at the same time indicates how financial obligations can add up in a commuter marriage. This situation, in all likelihood, could add pressure to a couple who are trying to make ends meet, especially for the man who is doing everything in his power to be financially responsible and through doing so, show his family how committed he is to them.

In Nigeria, house rent is usually collected once in two years and in some cases yearly. Some landlords could even decide to increase the rent arbitrarily and tenants do not really have any leverage despite an edict that should protect both tenants and landlords (Umah 2016; Nnodim 2017). These laws are often not adhered to by landlords and many tenants may be ignorant of these laws. In addition, if you are moving to a new house, and an agent helps you find the house, you pay an agent's fee or a finder's fee which is usually 10% of the house rent at first payment. For example, if the landlord asks for two year's rent at N500,000, (five hundred thousand naira) you pay an agency fee of N50,000 (fifty thousand naira) in addition to the house rent, this translates to about \$1,400. Sometimes, other payments come up like paying a lawyer to sign a contract of occupancy. These are some of the added reasons why owning and moving to your own house is much desired in Nigeria.

One of the adjusting couples (Isaac) talked enthusiastically about being involved in building their home:

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<sup>9</sup>At the end of 2017, one US dollar equalled approximately 360 Nigerian naira.

*I thought we could rent on my salary, but my mum-in-law suggested we start our own building with that money we could have used to rent. She also said she was not asking us to leave (his wife and daughter stay with her parents). I thank God for my in-laws... And with N 2,000,000<sup>10</sup> (two million naira)(\$5,500) we could build a boy's quarters (a smaller apartment, also known as a bachelor's apartment, than a family house that can be used as a domestic worker's living area or a guest house) ...and start building, it made sense, squeeze yourself for a year so you don't pay rent. My biggest challenge is maximizing resources, so I get the house done, that is why I'm on the routine I'm on (Isaac M AC).*

It is pertinent to note that this couple did not have the added burden of paying the rent of two houses as the wife lived with her parents in Jos and the husband lived with his aunt in Abuja. This is a very good arrangement for them as it enables them to save their resources and eventually build their own house. At the time of reporting these findings, they had not finished the building and were still living with relatives in the different commuting locations. The couple related their gratitude of having a family who understands their situation and come to their aid (chapter 9 dealing with social support networks explores how kin support commuter couples in more detail).

Owning a house is a big deal in Nigeria as it is in many other societies. Mulder & Wagner (1998), writing from a German perspective, state that home ownership is a crucial step in the life course and a highly desirable asset which is dependent on available resources. Mulder & Wagner (1998) continue by saying young and unmarried people do not immediately feel the need to become homeowners and homeownership requires a form of stability, sustainable income and wealth. Similarly, in Nigeria it is desirable, but difficult to attain one's own home and the younger (adjusting) commuter couples usually do not have sufficient income to own a home of their own.

In Nigeria, owning a home usually entails securing a piece of land, and hiring contractors yourself, including the architect/ builder, carpenter, mason and plumber in order to build a house. It could also be a long and exasperating process as it requires a constant flow of money to obtain the necessary skilled workers so that the process does not stagnate. It is not a usual practice for people to buy homes in Nigeria since the option of buying a house is quite slim and very

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<sup>10</sup>This is not the cost of renting a house in Jos. It is the couple's money from savings in addition to what could have been used to rent a house. The cost of renting a house per year is usually less in Jos.



expensive. Yet, buying a house in Nigeria could be an even more arduous task. This is mainly because the down payments, mortgage plans and other such options for acquiring a house from estate developers and other such services required from banks and creditors could be a gruelling process. The demands placed on customers who want to use such services are taxing, for example, they could ask for collateral, which the borrower is unlikely to have access to.

Michelle and Rebekah also talked about building their own houses and how the finances incurred in a commuting relationship has hampered this process. They talk about this in addition to other expenses in the following sections in detail.

### **6.2.2 Daily Living Expenses**

This subsection looks at how couples spend money on food, housekeeping and other day-to-day expenses. These expenses are mentioned almost as often as house rent. This was a big issue for the participants because they viewed the spending on these items as double spending. For participants, it is a case of maintaining two houses and therefore getting “two” of most things, the costs spiral and keep adding up. Lee (2015) opines that a commuter marriage is an expensive venture as it involves two residences as well as two household items. The author postulates that this negative implication of dual spending can be avoided if couples live together and may therefore hasten the decision to put an end to the commuter relationship. Some of the participants put this opinion in perspective:

*We are generally spending more than if we were in one place, it's like two houses, two sets of furniture, two everything. Two house rents, everything you are buying two (Uzo F AC).*

*I think we both feel the financial pressure, before you only had one house to worry about, now you have to worry about two. For instance, I have to travel more than I used to do, usually, weekly, you have to think about fuelling the car, make sure the car is in good shape and if you are going with the kids, so you have to prepare for anything they would need and all that, so it is financially intense. On both sides, before, you have one home and deal with all that in one home. You could even travel and forget something and have to buy those things (Tina F EC).*

*The financial implications, wow, wow, wow, it's quite taxing to say the least because you have to pay for two different services. He is paying in Lagos, he is paying here, and I think feeding from one pot is cheaper, you can imagine, we buy a bag of rice here, we buy there, everything we do is twice and Lagos is more expensive in many regards than Jos. For instance, he bought a water dispenser here and bought one there, I'm like this double, double spending on household equipment. My husband is someone who likes to make himself comfortable, he doesn't say, "since this is a temporary place let me manage" no, so when he was in Bauchi and left Bauchi, he bought everything and gave a lot of it away when he was leaving (Chizo F EC).*

*Pay the plumber, buy petrol for the generator all out of the overstretched budget and resources (Natalie F AC).*

*And then he is buying food because he does not have time to cook, it's part of the expenses, assuming he is around, that will not be an issue (Paula F EC).*

*Everything, I may need is expensive, arranging for pick up (for the children from school), I have two house helps because he is not there, one comes in the morning and one live-in help to help especially with the baby, I do all the running around and our expenses have gone high (Michelle F AC).*

*What I don't like is the financial aspect, two homes, my spending has doubled, I spend more money on food, because I eat out which we could save cost by her going to the market. Sometimes when she needs help with the plumbing or electricals, and she has to use money to call people to help her and sometimes they don't do a good job. This is also money meant for other expenses such as their feeding in Lagos, and there is no electricity from PHCN (the Power Holding Company of Nigeria responsible for energy and power distribution) most of the time so we run on the generator and I pay all these bills (Henry M AC).*

*My biggest challenge is the children's health. If not (for the children's health) I can organise myself. Like today, he (husband) called (from Abuja) asked if I should get a keke NAPEP (auto rickshaw or baby taxi) to take the children to school, but I considered I would have to look for extra money to pay for that service, so I decided to take them, but I use the services sometimes because I realise, I need to rest so I don't break down. If*

*I break down, who will take care of these children? This is how the finances go, you use what was not really planned for, what you are managing to save, you end up using*(Rebekah F EC).

The participants highlight one financial concern after the other. Their concerns are often similar such as spending on certain goods or services twice as in the case of buying furniture or paying for services to maintain the houses such as “*paying for the plumber*” and paying for public services such as the power supply.

Food expenses are made worse and additional costs are incurred by the persistent lack of a stable power supply across the country. The inability of the power distribution companies to provide adequate and constant power has been sarcastically referred to by Nigerians as power holding companies rendering ‘epileptic power’. Commuter couples pay double for this lack of power because they are bearing those expenses in both residential locations. The erratic power supply generally makes the buying of petrol to run the generator almost inevitable. Sometimes, the petrol to power the generator is not available due to scarcity, which results in long queues and/ high prices. The generator is the most dependable and preferred alternative to power supply in Nigeria even though, maintaining the generator is expensive and the generator itself could be very noisy and expensive to buy. Alternate energy sources such as battery run inverters and solar panels are currently being explored in the country, but they are yet to be generally used as the preferred alternate power supply because of the initial cost of installation. Yet, these alternate sources after the initial cost are low energy saving and kinder to the environment and neighbours. These alternate sources are also less noisy.

The expense of feeding and buying food for the different houses is another real expense. Buying in bulk for a household is cheaper and buying small portions at a time may be more expensive in the long run and these are the concerns Chizo, Paula and Henry highlight. They feel they can save money by being together and eating “*from one pot*”. Buying foodstuff in bulk is much cheaper, but when the food stuff is perishable and needs an electrical appliance for storage, families may be running at a loss when there is no power to keep the fridge or freezer running efficiently. When these appliances do not function properly, the foodstuff may rot.

Michelle raises the issue of paying for services to help her get through her day, from having two house helps and paying a driver to help her pick up the children from school as her timing and

the children's do not align; her home being far from her office and the children's school is not so near the house. Rebekah also talks about how she pays for services such as a driver to take the children to school so that she can rest and have some respite from taking care of the children, especially the sick children (Rebekah's plight was discussed in chapter 5).

The gendered division of household tasks could be seen, not only in how money is spent on childcare as well as ready-made food as opposed to home cooked meals, but also in how maintenance and repairs are being done. Henry, for example, shows concern about the money set aside for one thing (for example, buying groceries) being used for something different (for example, fixing an electrical fault) and not getting the right value for the service (the electrician could come and not do a good job, or buy the wrong part). This is a problem for Henry especially where his family is concerned, because the vendors could do a bad job leading to replacing the spoilt item. He feels like if he is not there to monitor or supervise the repairs, his wife may not get the best value for money and they would have spent money that could have been prevented.

For Rebekah and Michelle and the other couples who pay for household services and assistance (household services and domestic help will further be discussed in chapter 8), they use their financial power to buy out their responsibilities in the home. This also implies that women perform less housework as their earnings increase and they can thus employ and purchase the services of a house help or domestic worker to assist with the housework. Having a household helper is a societal and acceptable norm amongst the middle class in Nigeria and the ability of women to afford this, such as Michelle who has two employees, shows relations of gender and class.

Aryee (2005) states that employed domestic workers is the preserve of the middle class because of the expenses involved. Although all the women in this study are thus more involved in household and childcare related tasks compared to their husbands, the commuter marriage is to some extent made possible due to the paid labour employed in especially the primary household of the commuter couple. House rent matters, the double expenses for two households and other hidden expenses paint a picture of the financial challenges experienced by commuter couples.

### 6.2.3 The Cost of Phone Calls

This section looks at how participants view phone calls as being expensive. The phone calls as an aid to the marriage relationship and other ways it impacts on the marriage is discussed in the chapter seven.

The vanguard newspaper in Nigeria ran a report in 2014 stating that Nigerians spent a total of 447.8 billion naira on recharge cards alone monthly (\$1,238,556,138.20) (Arenyeka 2014). This is a large sum of money and commuter couples add their own bit to it as they are not together and must communicate in one way or the other. The phone call is the fastest and most convenient most times, but the financial costs take a toll on many commuter families:

*Phone calls are so expensive... It is very expensive (Praise F AC).*

*Then phone calls are expensive, when he wants to talk to the children, he talks to all four of them, they will even cry on the phone when they are fighting, he begins to do judge, okay, what happened? Ok, sorry, and all that and then you discover you are spending 30 minutes or more just on one call (Paula F EC).*

*Calling is a constant, it is not as expensive as it was earlier on, call units are cheap, and my phone provider gives a lot of bonuses (Isaac F AC).*

Praise and Paula's emphasise how expensive phone calls are. Situations of calls not going through due to static and other technicalities and still paying for that service were also reported. Isaac, however commends his phone provider for reducing the cost on his phone line.

### 6.2.4 Travel Costs

As mentioned in chapter 5, travelling is one of the highlighted challenges associated with a commuter marriage. This subsection takes a more detailed look at travel costs. The burden of travelling and travel costs are typically borne by the men in the commuter relationship because as stated earlier, for most of the participants, the wives were in the primary home of residence.

*I have to put a special budget for me to come, sometimes, for me to travel, one third of my salary has gone (Samson M AC).*

Samson goes home at least once in two months and he travels by road as there is no direct flight from Jos to Maiduguri. If he had the option of air travel, it would not have helped either as air travel in Nigeria is not cheap and has many logistical issues. Uzo adds:

*I guess beyond that (talking about the financial implications of the commuter marriage) he feels the burden of coming more, he comes more, that whole trip has added expenses, even when I go, he feels it more (Uzo F AC).*

Uzo establishes the fact that her husband bears the burden of the travels more as he travels more and also caters for her journey when she travels to see him. Uzo's husband, like Samson, also comes home at least once in two months<sup>11</sup>.

Isaac puts his costs in perspective:

*About fifteen to twenty thousand naira (N15000– N20000)(\$55) to come one way... and about twenty-five thousand (N25,000)(\$70) if you need to leave from Abuja (by air, one way), it is an added cost...by bus (public transportation) it's about five thousand naira (N5000)(\$15) ... the fuel scarcity, if I had my way, I'll get a driver and sit in the AC (air conditioned car), but the reason why you are out there is to make ends meet (Isaac M AC).*

Apart from the basic costs of paying for trips and the distance he is coming from, which makes the travel more expensive, Isaac alludes to the petrol scarcity. The scarcity makes it more expensive to fuel his car to embark on a long journey. His preferred option of travelling is not practical since employing a driver and paying him monthly will add to the living expenses. Also, putting on the air conditioner in the car all the time adds to the fuel consumption and wear and tear on the car, which in turn adds to maintenance costs, bearing in mind that the average Nigerian car owner drives a previously owned car as they cannot afford brand new car models.

### **6.2.5 Extended Family, Friends and Community Obligations**

Participants talked about how they were obligated to attend to family, friends and/or community needs. These are important since family forms an integral part of Nigerian communities. Social networks are important and the solidarity we show to one another has a huge impact on our lives.

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<sup>11</sup>These travel times are not static, sometimes there could be a public holiday or a workers strike that could facilitate coming home more than bi monthly. See chapter eight for more on this.

Some of the ways in which these obligations affected the commuter couples' spending is highlighted in this section.

*I try to budget, but it never works, sometimes, you get a phone call from someone (asking for help), you get friends over and you can't say 'I did not budget for you'... so it's not easy because of the two-house thing (Samson M AC).*

*Because she is in Lagos, the wider family sees it as if I'm there also. There were certain things I escaped when we were in Jos but now when the family is taxing (reaching out to family members for certain contributions for a wedding or funeral) or sharing 'asoebi' (common cloth worn by family and friends at family functions), my own is there. For instance, the wedding I am talking about (Henry had explained during the interview that he was going to attend a family wedding in which his nephew was getting married, he had a car accident on his way), I had planned to escape (he did not want to attend the wedding) but they have even put my name on RSVP (it is an honour to have the couple put your name on their wedding invitation as one of the people to contact about the wedding because they see you as important to them) and people have started calling me (from Lagos) and I'm here (in Jos). If she was here, they will say, I am far and they will not put my name but... so family expenses also add up, extended family expenses (Henry M AC).*

*Our family is here, birthday here, cousin's wedding there, he is not around and I am the representative. God bless you if you don't show up or show up with something insignificant, all these cost money... burial, customary greetings for births, deaths (Natalie F AC).*

Extended family obligations add up to the spending in these participant views. Henry's report puts it in a clearer perspective as obligations to family functions of extended family members are taken very seriously in Nigeria. These functions may vary from the birth of a niece or nephew, marriages of cousins, burials, birthday parties and family thanksgivings as Natalie emphasised. Many of these events suppose that family members make themselves available in person and/ or make a kind of financial contribution or gift towards the event as a sign of solidarity and belonging to the family. Sometimes, with weddings, there is a common cloth or an outfit that family members wear to identify with the couple. This cloth is commonly called 'asoebi' or

‘family cloth’ in the Yoruba language (Ajani 2012) or ‘anko’ in the Hausa language, these cloths usually cost anything between N3,000 to N50,000 (three thousand to fifty thousand naira or more) (\$10-\$100), depending on the celebrants of the occasion.

Samson also portrays how family and friends expect to be catered to and commuter couples are obligated to cater to them. Samson laments that you cannot simply turn down a friend or family member who calls asking for financial help since it will be against all expectations. As was already shown, extended family members can contribute to the support of commuter couples (such as providing accommodation) but there are also obligations towards the extended family that may become a burden.

### **6.3 For Richer, For Poorer**

This section focuses on the perspectives of wives versus husbands on how their living apart has impacted their financial situation. A clear gendered division in perception and handling of money can be traced.

#### **6.3.1 Wives View on the Financial Implications of a Commuter Marriage**

As this section takes a gendered look on the financial aspect of a commuter marriage, women’s narratives on the finances in their marriages are discussed in two subsections below.

##### **6.3.1.1 Women’s View on Their Husbands and Finances**

Women’s views about their husbands and the financial roles they play are explored in this section. Here, some women argue that they feel the financial pressures of a commuter marriage more as they have to manage family resources as well as cater for children through the week. Husbands are not usually around to see how their wives spend money and have to try and stretch the money as much as possible. According to the female participants, their husbands cannot therefore fully appreciate what they go through.

Women also highlight how they sometimes spend more than the budget and what their husbands send for upkeep and household allowances. When it is time to reconcile accounts, some realize they have spent in excess, they do not take their own financial contributions into account, not letting their husbands know what they have spent outside the allotted amount. This is not done to keep husbands in the dark, but rather in a spirit of building the home together and contributing their resources for the smooth running of the home.



The women appreciate their husbands' efforts as the breadwinners and carriers of the big bills such as school fees and house rents, therefore, the augmenting they do to aid the household is really not too much of a sacrifice, even though it puts some pressure on their pockets and the household. They are able to bear it because they earn an income and it is mostly used towards their home and their children.

The general economic decline in Nigeria appears to be shifting more of the financial burden to women than before. Women have always been directly responsible for the day-to-day running of the home and the never-ending stream of unbudgeted expenses such as clothing and children's extra-curricular activities, whereas husbands may handle investments and long-range financial activities (Mano-Negrin & Katz 2003). Okeke (1997), writing about Nigerian women, opines that they must contend with the inflationary pressures of structural adjustment<sup>12</sup>, especially the daily strains of unstable market prices. With a grossly devalued currency and the declining sources of revenue for men, women must stretch monthly earnings further to meet what has become a regular shortfall in their husband's share of the family's allowance. This opinion, though written in the 1990s, describes what women in Nigeria are still going through. It was recently announced that Nigeria is out of a recession (Oladeinde 2017) but the impact of the recession, such as the rising cost of goods and service, keeps many families in Nigeria in the same situation as described by Okeke. Even with an increasing economic burden, the women in this study still consider their contributions as mainly supplementary.

Some narratives to buttress this view are examined below:

*He does let me say, eighty percent of it, he takes care of most of it, my care and (our daughter), there may be times when the money is not readily available and I take care of it but he always reimburses me. My money, I use for my shop. It's basically him, he feels the financial burden more, because, he's the man and a responsible man, I don't joke with that. He's a responsible husband (Saratu F AC).*

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<sup>12</sup>Structural adjustment programs, or SAPs for short, are a complex of loans that the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) offer to a country suffering from an economic crisis. The main goal of SAPs is to reduce the fiscal imbalances of the borrowing country. SAP came at a time when Nigeria was beset by a charged political atmosphere fuelled by the biting economic hardship that hit most families (Nwagbara 2011).

Saratu asserts that her husband bears the financial burdens more and emphasises that her money is hers to do with as she deems fit because her husband is responsible and takes care of the pressing bills. She puts in her help when necessary as his income is more than her's and she makes sure, "he takes care of most of it". Her husband Isaac continues this discussion on his wife's contribution to the household in the subsection analysing men and finances in a commuting family (section 6.3.2.1).

*Some women don't ask because they have been given and don't want to ask again, some don't even ask again because of the response they will get from the man. I tell him anyway that we need certain things, but I make it easy and say, 'if you have or when you have' (Natalie F AC).*

*Huge, it's like taking care of two homes. Initially most of the financial burdens were on him, but gradually with this (commuter relationship) the strain on me is more and coming, I have to fill in a lot of gaps ... I can't wait for him all the time... Issues (financial) come up during the week when he is not around and I have to take care of those things, it's like the savings are gradually dwindling and the demands (financial) are more... I think I feel the financial pressure because there are some things I'm doing now that I would not have done before... When I tell him, I've spent so and so (x amount of money) on this when he comes, he would want to refund but sometimes I feel bad and I say no, but I wish deep down I could collect the money. So, the financial pressures are for me, managing the money and thinking about how to stretch it (Lumya F AC).*

*So, the women feel the pressure more. Especially the pressure to manage and stretch resources. Even when he takes care of the big bills, you find there are times he may not cover fully so you have to contribute because something has come up at work, or with his or my family (extended). Sometimes, after he has given upkeep money, I find it difficult to ask because I feel he does not have, as he has told me and I tell myself, he works in a bank, let me not pressure him too much to the point he finds himself doing something illegal, so I manage and forego many things (Michelle F AC).*

Pahl (2000, pp.503-504) argues as follows in favour of the woman being the manager of the resources:

When money is short, and making ends meet is hard, women typically manage finances on behalf of the household...In general, men tend to have more personal spending money than women do, especially in households where they control finances. Women are more likely than men to deprive themselves when money is short, and this situation is most likely to occur in low income households and in households with adequate incomes, but strong male control of finances...Where women control household finances a higher proportion of household income is likely to be spent on the children and on collective expenditure for the household as a whole, compared with the situation when men control finances.

Burgoyne, Clarke, Reibstein & Edmunds (2006, p.621) shed more light on the what it means to be in control of the money and what it means to be a manager of the family resources:

Next, the level of income can influence how money is managed, with women more likely to have the task of routine management (e.g., making ends meet)... overall control may remain with the main breadwinner, typically the man. This distinction between control and management of money is an important one. Management may be a chore when money is tight, and does not necessarily imply much power. Control, on the other hand, implies having the power of veto over certain categories of expenditure, or having the final say on spending priorities. At higher income levels, men are often seen as having the relevant expertise (and hence more say) in long-term financial planning; and when they are the main breadwinners, are more likely to have overall control regardless of the system of management used by the couple.

The authors, thus reiterate the reports from the female participant that when money is not readily available, managing it can be a very difficult task and that men have full control of these resources when they are the main providers and do not share that role with their wives. The entrenchment of the male breadwinner role is also strongly demonstrated in the above quotations. These women expect their husbands to be the main providers and if they struggle to do so, their own smaller income that may be intended for luxuries (“cake winners” as described by Winfield 1985) is then used for necessities that their husbands are expected to pay for. Being a breadwinner thus has two sides: having control, but also feeling the pressure of delivering on expectations. In some cases, the women try to ease the financial expectations on their husbands, but the pressure is always present as will be discussed further in the next section.

### **6.3.1.2 Women’s View on the Practicalities of Spending**

Here we look at what women spend their money on, how they spend the money and their views on the commuter marriage on money. The individual financial effect of the commuter relationship has on the home and how they view the financial pressures are thus the focus.

*The truth is that women have needs of their own and should be able to have their own money, but at this point, he feels the pressure more because I closed my shop and he is the only one working. We are building a house at the moment, and the drugs and medical care for these children is on the high side but I try to be content. I let go of some of the things I want and what he is able to do, I appreciate it and that's all (Rebekah AC F).*

Rebekah has been married for more than 10 years. In chapter 5, her challenges were discussed specially because of her unique situation in which she had twins who suffered from sickle cell anaemia. In her case, whatever challenges she has arising from the commuter relationship is compounded by having sick children which increases their expenses.

*I also think the pressure is on me, because I feel for him when he is pressured and I wish I had a good paying job, sometimes I even ask him what he thinks about a business idea and he doesn't always think it's a good idea. I also think of ways to augment and make the resources stretch because I feel it's just one person and I can imagine how he feels and you want to help in any way possible (Dinah F AC).*

Dinah, one of the two women to be interviewed with her husband, sees her husband's financial contributions as huge and she really appreciates this. Her concern is that she does not have an adequate income to make a satisfactory contribution to the family's purse in order to cushion the effects of a 'two' house system. This is because her job as a teacher paid very little and she had been in-between jobs prior to the interview. She feels the financial burden of this commuter relationship as much as her husband, as the onus of managing the resources available rests with her. This is critical as she is with the children and must cater to their needs as well as their wants as much as she can with the limited resources available to her. The theme of the women or wives as the managers of the resources runs through the narratives of both husbands and wives.

*I think it's our generation that has this burden, it seems like that, like one salary is not enough to take care of the family if you want to be comfortable. Our parents' generation one salary was enough...He was very driven to provide for his family. My family was in Jos, it never got to that point but if no food, we could go to my parents' house and they would feed us. For me, it wasn't so much of an issue, but for him, due to his background, it was a very big thing, he never wanted to be in a position where he could not provide for his family, I think it was more on him really... In my husband's case, he can afford*

*pretty much anything but it has come at a cost, and I'm wondering if that cost has been worth it, how many cars can you drive at a time, how many houses, ok yes, we have a roof over our heads and we are not starving, but at what cost (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth has a husband who provides everything for them, but she believes it has cost them something in that they are practically estranged. She reports that they now visit each other once a year, of which either she goes to him or he comes to her. At the time of the interview, she had a wedding to attend in Lagos and she used the opportunity to visit her husband, making it a second time that year.

*I have monthly allowances, but because he is not around, I feel I should hold up on certain expenses, like electricity, fees, cable TV and some pressing bills. My husband is different, he will use the money for the purpose as soon as it is there. Now that I am pregnant, I eat whatever I want, when I want and I don't care what the money is kept aside for, now I am trying to discipline myself, but if he was around, he would help me in this area (Linda F AC).*

Linda observes that she and her husband need to be together physically, as a couple to achieve their financial goals and meet their needs. She does not believe that distance will help them in their financial planning. She admits to her lack of prudence in spending money for what needs to be done, at the time it should be done. If any savings or gains are to be made financially, it will help to do things and pay bills as assigned and when due. Her account explains that both of them need to be together.

Speaking further about the practical aspects of women's spending, Michelle and Paula have this to say:

*It's draining resources and hampering our progress, at first, we thought I would move with him to Kaduna but it didn't happen. Then we started talking about building a house, we started considering if it will be Jos or Kaduna and the expenses of staying apart has not helped us save so much to be able to build, its slowing our progress on things we want to achieve because we are far apart (Michelle F AC).*

*It slows women down especially, even for their own personal development. If he was around, there are things he would have done or bought, but I end up doing those things*

*and I can't say (to her husband) give me the money I bought tomatoes with yesterday. Now these are resources I would have used for myself and development, but it has gone to housekeeping or whatever and also slows down my development... Then I'm here with the children, and... school contributions (apart from school fees) and children's visiting day (she has two children in boarding school) sometimes he could send (money for the visiting days) at his discretion or not.(Paula F EC).*

Paula talks about women's desires and developments that do not seem to materialise because the money is used in housekeeping. She also adds what other money is spent on things seems to be one sided because she is the one attending to the daily spending most of the time. This is partly because her husband is not around and partly because the expense are made in his absence, it costs a seemingly insignificant amount but these minute details add up.

Michelle continues to throw more light on how women spend on the home:

*It's the woman, yes, the husband could bear the 'big' bills, but the 'small' bills are borne by the woman. He may buy a bag of rice, but the ingredients to go with it may take one thousand naira every other day or children's medicine two thousand naira or family contribution, or church contribution and being a member of society and he is not around. What I do is quite significant and could add up, there is a certain amount he gives us whether it is enough or not enough is not the issue. Sometimes, I have to go borrowing and I can't tell him, I have to cover and manage what it is, he is not with us so once he sends upkeep money, he blows the rest on whatever he feels. Like I'm planning to buy a bag, but when the house needs come, I forego my plans. Sometimes I call to tell him the money is short, if I do borrow to meet some needs, I might be the one to end up paying from my pocket because what he sends the next month may not be enough. Many times, I forego my things just to make things stretch. If he was around to see how the household runs, maybe it will help. If he makes tea (most likely hot chocolate) here for you, he just puts the milk in, no economizing, as far as he is concerned, he has given money for it. I told him once, if you were at home with us, this thing you are doing with milk, you won't be doing it. As the wife, you know that taking that rich cup of tea means buying milk in another few days, so you will watch it and see that this tin of milk lasts us two weeks(Michelle F AC)*

Michelle's account helps us to focus on what exactly women see and what their concerns are. Where she states '*he is not with us so once he sends upkeep money, he blows the rest on whatever he feels*' is an indication of how women end up spending much more on the household even to the extent of borrowing to make ends meet. Also, they use their resources sparingly when her husband is away while her husband seems to be unaware of how careful they have to measure the basic necessities such as milk.

Women are more family-focused in their spending than men. Despite husbands defining the wife's earnings as being for her own individual use, in reality wives typically chose to spend their income on the family and related household matters.

### **6.3.2 Husbands' Views on the Financial Implications of a Commuter Marriage**

The views and perceptions of men on finances and their perceptions of their wives take on finances are presented here. Okeke (1997) submits that with (Nigerian) men, their share of the financial burden is often limited to major or more predictable items of expenditure such as a fixed monthly allowance, school fees, paying the house rent/building a house and car purchases. The responses below from the male participants in a commuter marriage seem to confirm that this view is still accurate.

#### **6.3.2.1 Men's Perspectives on Finances in a Commuter Marriage**

How men see finances in a commuter marriage is examined below.

*I can be selfish and say mine (the financial pressure of a commuter marriage) is more and hers is easier but I don't think any is easier ... the pressure is real and I can't even socialise, you go out to drink with your friends and you calculate or you spend one thousand five hundred naira on drinks and you know that's a bag of cement, and say that's a pack of diapers, there is pressure on both sides ... Guys are more logical, so it may not show on me and my mood that I'm upset about finances but you can tell when she's upset about money and she may not tell you, but she expects you to ask and you ask just for formality, but you know its finances ... I'm certain a lot of men want to provide financial security for their wives, the car she wants to drive, family vacation, good schools for their children, men want to do that and women appreciate men who do that, you can be ugly but if you can provide financially, you are attractive (Isaac M AC)*

Again, the centrality of men as providers are underlined even to the extent that it makes men more attractive as partners according to Isaac. Isaac continues by saying:

*Funny enough, this routine has helped me save much, I literally spend one hundred naira on transportation and I don't have to worry about fuelling or fixing the car. I eat lunch for three hundred naira, dinner is the stir-fry of which I bought vegetables of two thousand naira from Jos because it is cheaper than Abuja and the vegetables have lasted two months. Essentially in Abuja where people could spend one hundred to two hundred thousand naira in a month, I've been able to cut down my expenses to twenty to thirty thousand naira ...I'm privileged, I have an aunt and relatives whom I have been staying with ...renting a place in Abuja is expensive and for my kind of budget, it would be in a place that is far from work and no good amenities, so I'm glad I have relatives and I'm not a freeloader with my aunt(Isaac M AC).*

Isaac gives a breakdown on finances, the commuting relationship made him save towards building his house and led him to a healthy lifestyle. Isaac is motivated to save and look keenly into his finances. His living with his aunt shows a kin exchange, he emphatically states that he is not living off his aunt. He lives in her house, but he takes on some financial and practical responsibility as well. For example, he mentioned bringing back food from Jos to his aunt in Abuja.

For Emmanuel, the situation is similar:

*This commuter marriage is taking so much money, so much money, my transportation in Delta is much more expensive than it would be in Jos, sometimes, I ask myself, is this necessary? Sometimes, I spend about eight hundred naira a day on transport apart from feeding, thankfully I live with my cousin in a rented place and we share living expenses... The calls, their needs (his family in Jos), the little allowance for them, is not enough again. I'm hoping to come back to Asaba even though Onitsha is better for me to grow in my job, but I am in Asaba for a reason and Onitsha is draining my pocket...If we are together, there will be less pressure and more stability. Running two homes, ... the financial aspect, even though I am the only one there, it is still running two homes. If I rent a home in Onitsha (Onitsha is in a different state, i.e. Anambra state in Nigeria), it means I've lost focus because it's a whole new dynamic (Emmanuel M AC).*



Emmanuel was posted to work in Onitsha (Anambra State) from Asaba (Delta State) but lived in Asaba. The expensive daily journey was anything from 30 minutes to three hours (one way) depending on the traffic. He even considered getting a house in Onitsha so as avoid the costs and the traffic. He goes on to say:

*The commuter relationship can help you stay focused and if you have a financial goal, you can adhere to it because there are certain things you won't do, for example, you won't go out unnecessarily, as husband and wife you can share each other's finances but if you have a goal you will adhere (Emmanuel M AC).*

He associates being in one place with your spouse as an end to spending so much money on running two homes. He advocates sticking to a financial plan that can help couples achieve certain goals. As has been mentioned earlier, adjusting couples did not own their own home but were renting. The financial goals he is referring to here is to enable them to own a home, a car for the family and the ability to afford other luxuries like trips abroad. He also emphasises that being in a commuter marriage can help you stay focused financially, but it may be hard to achieve because of the pressure of catering to the increasing needs of the family.

Interestingly, both Isaac and Emmanuel allude to the same values and both see the commuter marriage as an avenue to save money and focus on family needs. This saving on their part may not be unrelated to the fact that they are both sharing living expenses with family members and can put those extra resources to other use.

#### **6.3.2.2 Men's Views on Their Wives and Money**

How men view their wives and money is discussed below.

*By our culture and dream, you just want her to sit at home, do her hair, clothe her, but not all women want to sit at home and do nothing, they want to apply themselves and my wife earns well now ...I'm glad she's working and earning more now and I appreciate her support, at least I don't have worry about how much Pringles (a brand name for imported potato chips) costs, she can handle it and in her own way and I can focus on the capital projects...the pressure to provide lies with me more I think, but the pressure to manage what we have, lies with her more, she wants to make sure that that what is provided for lasts. Guys don't really get what it means to manage, I don't think we grasp*

*that. For example, the few times I've been around and the Pringles finishes, and I have to go buy and I ask they say one thousand, two hundred naira(N1,200) and all the while I've been thinking its five hundred naira(N500) and it finishes this fast! So, you don't think about all that, she gives you a budget and you scale it down, telling her this is all you can afford now and she has to say what we need now and what can come later, she knows this is important now or later.... if I was the one at home managing what I bring, I don't think we'll get to the end of the week, I'm not sure we can eat as well as we do and buy the kind of clothes we wear including my clothes, somehow, she makes it work, I've tried it, she goes to the market with twenty thousand naira(N20,000) and is bringing things out of the boot, I go with twenty thousand naira(N20,000) and I don't know what I've bought. So, the pressure to provide is with me, but the pressure to manage is with her (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac points out that his wife is the manager of the money when he says how she is able to buy so much with the little he gives her. He knows that she can afford to buy the treats for their daughter and spend money on other 'little' things so he can think about other big things. He is really grateful for his wife's support.

*I would think I feel the pressure more as she has not had any good paid job per se, I have been working, paying rent, transport, feeding for me and them... sometimes before the month is up, she calls me and says their money is gone and it gets me worried, you have two mouths (the children) you can't explain to, the pressure is not them, but me saying how is she going to cope before I am able to send something. We learned to develop a relationship with grocers so we could collect foodstuff on credit. We are credit worthy, so the pressure is, I'm thinking how will she cope till I can send something. I don't think this is really good, you have to have a good paying job to be able to cope (Samson M AC).*

Samson, like his wife (Dinah), feels the added pressure of his wife not having a good job that can help sustain their living expenses. Due to this reason, he feels to be able to cope in a commuter relationship a good paying job is necessary.

*My wife feels like I should not be the only one bearing the burden of the school fees and such, she wants to help (Henry M AC).*

This is very much appreciated by Henry but he also feels he should be with the family as this will help in proper utilization of resources. When the wife is able to handle certain financial bills in the absence of the husband, it reduces the pressure on the two parties as Samson, Henry and Isaac alluded to. Yet, it is clear that the main breadwinning role is expected of men and if women are able to assist, it is appreciated.

As Tsang, Harvey, Duncan, & Sommer, (2003) assert, employed women increase the economic resources for their families, thereby affecting husbands' marital satisfaction. In effect, what they found was that dual-earner status led to higher indirect marital happiness through income effects.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter viewed the financial perceptions of husbands and wives in a commuter marriage. Findings showed that the husband was the main breadwinner of the family and both male and female participants see the economic responsibility towards the family as his main responsibility. He knows this, his wife knows this and the wider family also accepts this. It is thus a societal norm. Wives' income in the home is mainly seen as supplementary and appreciated by the husbands as they make financial contributions to the household expenditure and manage the family resources to see that it stretches.

In addition to managing resources, women do not spend their money only on themselves but much more on the household and children. They go to great lengths to sacrifice towards the household and are understanding and appreciative of their husbands' efforts. This is not an easy feat as the little resources they have as a family is also shared in many ways, among many other cares including a double expense on housing, daily living and extended family affairs since commuter couples are part of a wider kin network. They are obligated to attend to the financial needs of their families as being a part of a wider family entails communal exchanges. Similarly, some commuter couples live with their extended family in the commuter locations, with such outcomes as sharing living costs and reciprocating mutual bonds.

The commuter marriage is entered into to make ends meet and to attain a middle-class status, but the discussions show that the commuter marriage routine does not seem to make financial sense in all cases given the added financial obligations couples face. In Ruth's case, whatever financial gains were recorded, they were overshadowed by the breakdown of the family relationship.

Although the financial gain is one of the reasons cited for entering into a commuter relationship, the financial burdens may in some cases outweigh the benefits.

In terms of a gendered life course perspective, it appears that the commuter relationships entrench the norms of men as breadwinners and women as caregivers. The reported practices and views expressed in financial matters, show appreciation for all financial contributions from spouses, but changes in financial control between couples were not expressed. In the cited cases, support was found for the assessment by Pahl (2000) and Burgoyne et al (2006) that men have the controlling financial power in households and women have to manage as best they can.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE PRACTICE OF MARRIAGE

#### 7.1 Introduction

The perceptions of husbands and wives on the financial implications of a commuter family were examined in the previous chapter. This chapter addresses the theme of practising the marriage and determining what couples in commuter marriages do to make their marriages work, seeing that after entering a turning point by embarking on a commuter marriage, couples have entered a new trajectory. This new commuter trajectory will be explained in the discussions in this chapter.

Research question two, how do commuter couples cope in a commuter relationship, (see Chapter 1 section 1.3) is answered in two parts; the first part is presented in this chapter. This chapter also sheds more light on the organizing theme communication (see fig. 2), both verbal and non-verbal, under the following sub themes: the dynamics of a phone call (technological aid); how couples conduct themselves when they are apart and when they are together (face-to-face interaction); their desires and expectations of themselves as well as their spouses with regard to traditionally assigned gender roles and their own perceptions of what makes their marriages unique (family practices). Accounts from the interviews, time diary entries and scholarly literature specific to communication and the practice of marriage are used to aid the discussion.

#### 7.2 Practical Communication

There are practical ways that commuter couples undertake to make the marriage work and be enjoyable and communication is key to this.

*Communication is key and very important, work on the communication because there is a tendency that distance can creep in if you are not careful. I have that tendency, so I had to discipline myself, keep at it, we also worked at it, it was not so in the beginning (Sratu F AC).*

Sratu and her husband, signal that communication is key in the relationship and her husband goes further to encourage wives to build themselves up.

*If you are already in the marriage and you find yourself commuting, then you communicate a lot and explain the situation. Guys don't feel they need to explain*

*anything to anybody but you have to explain, don't take it for granted that she knows why you guys are commuting (Isaac M AC).*

*Ensure you keep the communication lines open, don't take anything for granted, make the call, send a text, do something. Make sure that communication gap is not breached... Since this seems to be in the women's hands as it seems most of the husbands are away, women should take charge, not bossfully but to make sure the home runs smoothly (Lumya F AC).*

Lumya also highlights communication, but also advises women to take charge of situations. When she says women should not take “*charge bossfully*” (bossy), she means that women taking charge is not always an acceptable protocol among “traditional” families (see section 7.5).

The couples continue their discourse on making communication practical in a marriage and in the sections, that follow it will be shown how they highlight other channels that open or close up communication lines in a marriage and how this affects the marriage relationship.

### **7.3 Technological Aids to Communication: Telephone Conversations**

Phone calls in Nigeria are mainly supported by private telephone service or GSM service providers with the use of mobile phones (Smith 2006). Sometimes, the services can be terrible with weak signals, dropped calls, high tariffs and non-deliverance of services advertised. As commuter couples do not share the same residence for most of the working week and more weeks in some cases, the most efficient and logical way for them to keep in touch and communicate is by the use of telephones and new technology. This new technology and telephone calls are not always at optimal level. The bad experiences with the phone calls and not being able to reach your spouse or family when you need them becomes a transition in the life course of the individuals and families. The impact this has on service providers and the agency used by individuals to change network providers or switch to another mode of communication becomes significant over the life course. The ability to share joys and sorrows; receive or make a phone call at the right time with their spouse or family member is part of the transitionary phase and helps to bridge the gap across distances. This leads to stronger family units and happier, satisfied people.

Families record successes when events happen at the right time, and when certain patterns are predictable. The narratives will show how calls lead to bonding and intimacy among other positive values in family life. The use of technology as a tool that causes a significant impact in the transitions and trajectories of participants is important.

In this subsection, the meaning of a phone call, the negotiation of a phone call and what couples like or dislike about the telephone are discussed. During interviews, some of the couples talked about what the phone call means to their relationship. They also disclosed what they appreciate about the ability to use the phone to keep the relationship going while some of the couples mentioned expressly that they do not like making phone calls due to how restrictive it could be. Other discussions revolved around which spouse calls who, when, as well as the conditions attached. The discussions are presented below.

### **7.3.1 The Joys of a Phone Call**

*The occasional missing, which is nothing major, we talk on the phone, quite a bit (Saraf AC).*

Her husband continues:

*With the wife, it's a whole lot of phone calls, I call in the morning to find out how they are, call and tell her, I've arrived and then if there is time during the day, you catch up, if not, later in the evening, we can chat. Calling is a constant (Isaac M AC).*

*We communicate and talk every day...because of the kind of person she is, she says what is on her mind, the distance does not stop her, from where she is, she will say it as it is and you will know exactly what it is (Henry M AC).*

*We talk a lot on the phone and give all the gist (small talk, summary of important events). We could talk for one hour. It's just that he is not around... He calls a lot, so as far as I am concerned, our relationship is intact. It's just his presence that is an issue (Rebekah F EC).*

These couples report that the phone has been a great assistance in their relationship, in that the distance is diminished since they are able to use the phone to keep their relationships together. This is significant in their transitions as husband and wife. Isaac and Rebekah emphasise that the husbands are the more frequent callers in their experiences. Other participants did not state this

expressly but this singular act of husbands being the more frequent callers has an angle of romance and responsibility attached. It shows that husbands are concerned, involved and committed to their families and if they cannot be there, then they are checking up by constantly calling. The romantic side to it is that the husbands are still “chasing the wives”, keeping the marriage flames alive. However, there could also be a controlling angle to these phone calls where husbands are checking up on their wives. I have observed that women do not always have enough call units on their phones (this is also suggested by Praise’s and Michelle’s report in the next, section 7.3.2). There is thus a financial angle in that men are able to purchase more calling units than women. These call units are usually referred to as ‘credit’ (Smith 2006, Arenyeka 2014). Even in the simple act of telephone communication a gendered dimension is evident.

### **7.3.2 The Downsides of a Phone Call**

Although some couples report on how phone calls helped them in their marriages to keep in touch, other couples have a different view about phone calls in their relationships.

*Whatever you can say on phone is limited, thank God for GSM...(but) I didn’t like the limiting capacity of the phone...sometimes, we have an argument and because we are not together to talk and reason, shout, argue, disagree because the phone is not appropriate... talking on the phone can be hard work for me. I don’t like talking on the phone, or chatting either, I can be a very lazy phone user, my phone use is for music and the like, I remember to call when I know it’s necessary to call my wife (Samson M AC).*

*You can’t say or express yourself through texts or phones cause you want to see him and tell him pressing issues(Linda F AC).*

Her husband continues:

*I don’t feel comfortable talking on the phone, it might be bugged sometimes I’m reserved because I don’t know who is bugging the phone, sometimes, I just say is it not my wife? We just talk on the phone and enrich MTN, not just enrich them, but give them free information (Emmanuel).*

Linda and her husband Emmanuel, share the same thoughts when it comes to how impersonal the phone can be. They do not feel they can express themselves properly on the phone. Emmanuel



particularly believes the mobile phones are not secure and could be bugged by the phone company for whatever reason, or there could be a situation where you have a third party listening in on your conversation. This is a suspicion that some phone users in Nigeria have especially politicians (I am not able to verify this claim).

*Over the phone, it's how was your day like, how are the kids, etc. There is nothing personal in the phone calls and I have made it a point of duty that somebody has to bring it back and it has to be me(Lumya F AC).*

Lumya, like the other participants in this section, says that the phone is impersonal and monotonous. She feels like some more energy should be added to their conversations. She is willing to take on the challenge in order to make call sessions robust and rewarding. This will help their relationship in that they are able to speak more and tell each other things that matter.

*Phone calls are also expensive...it's just because the economic situation is the way it is... the fact that we don't talk as we should. 'Hello' is all the talk or we don't talk for a whole day (Michelle F AC).*

*Phone calls are so expensive, especially if you have to discuss something important, the credit will finish, you will borrow credit, he will send you credit, like now, some banks have made it easy for you to buy credit from your account his own will finish and then you have to end the call there, that's when the gist will now end (Praise F AC).*

These descriptions reveal how phone calls (or the lack of it) could hinder the 'closeness' of couples in a commuter relationship. This is because some people view the telephone as a disconnected and impersonal tool that cannot precisely convey their thoughts and feelings. Some couples feel that the phone calls are monotonous with nothing more than a greeting and asking how the children are. The lack of communication in this area may not help the marriage as issues to be discussed during the days they are apart are not properly handled, leading to a wider gap in the distant relationship.

### **7.3.3 The Negotiations of a Phone Call**

Couples also talked about the reasons a phone call could be truncated including how the timings of their calls could be frustrating to the relationship, especially when calls come in to them or

their spouses at certain times when the call is not convenient or ill-timed. The following examples illustrate this:

*Even though we talk on the phone a lot, but it's not the same... sometimes she calls and I tell her I'm busy, I'm doing something and maybe she's just calling to say I love you and I feel bad...sometimes it's not what I'm ready to deal with at that time because I'm in the middle of something (Emmanuel M AC).*

*As in, things will happen and I will be like, if he was here, I'll tell him, but by the time we talk on the phone, I have to edit everything and talk about the important things and shelve that which you would have but there are other priorities and then the moment just passes(Uzo F AC).*

*Sometimes, he calls and I'm bathing or something and we can't talk, so... We tried to schedule talks. In the mornings, he does not get my full attention, we are bathing, getting ready for school, at night, it's so busy, bathing kids, doing homework, getting dinner, we say we'll talk later and nothing, you can't reach due to network (poor signal) and the day goes and you can't reach him to get his input on certain things, some things cannot wait till later and when I can't get his attention, I hate those moments(Michelle F AC).*

*Sometimes you have issues arising at home and you want to talk immediately and I call him and he's in a meeting, he's away, trying to board a plane, 'I'll switch off now, we'll talk later'...then we talk and decide about a lot of things like, if I don't get you in the morning, what time is good for you? 'Negotiation' (Tina F EC).*

*Initially, we start with the best intentions in the world, you call and text each other, morning and evening, after a while, you skip a day and you are like ooh I haven't heard from my husband in two days, after a while, it becomes normal and it's not good... It may depend on the nature of the people involved, some people are successful when it comes to calling and texting, my husband is very driven and single minded, when he is doing one thing he is doing one thing to the core to the exclusion of everyone else. Sometimes when you call, you kind of sense that he's in the middle of something and you say, I won't call him now in case he's in the middle of something, and before you know it, almost two days have gone and we haven't spoken in a couple of days (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth's experiences are different from Henry's:

*She knows when to call and when not to call, like when I am in class, she will send a text and I will know to call*(Henry M AC).

Couples report that they have times to be reached and times they are unavailable for a phone call. Some, like Tina and Henry, are able to negotiate and have a plan on when to call.

Lee (2015) states that women can consult their husbands about small and big things over the phone and other electronic devices and this goes a long way in relieving stress and bringing about a sense of togetherness with their spouses. However, Michelle and Ruth get frustrated by the inability to talk at the time they need to and this leads to a gap in communication. They talk about not talking to their husbands at certain times, this could definitely hinder the communication process and hamper the growth of the relationship because whatever the call was for, the moment passes and may be very difficult to recapture again, especially on the phone.

The phone is an aid to the marital relationship, it cannot be substituted for face-to-face interaction. The reports from participants suggest that couples would rather be together than juggle phone calls as there is a limit to which using the phone to call can hold the relationship together.

#### **7.3.4 Other Means of Communicating**

Phone call and texting are widely and generally accepted in Nigeria and participants in this study use it as a means of keeping in touch. Since cellular phones are relatively cheap, other options such as sending text messages are of course also used. This helps couples to keep abreast of daily happenings and to send reminders to each other as these can be read later and a phone call does not necessarily have to be made at the time of sending the text.

Apart from texting and phoning, emails and instant messaging can also be used, but using other technology is not common in this study and most participants preferred speaking on the phone. Nobody for example, ever mentioned using e-mails. There were, however, exceptions with some newer forms of technology.

Henry talks about a new messaging service which uses data on the mobile phone to send messages, videos and voice notes: *thank God for WhatsApp* (Henry M AC). He is grateful for this technology which helps their communication.

Isaac also mentions a feature on his type of phone which made it possible for him and his wife to do more than talk on the phone: *there was a time we were both able to video chat when we had the same phone* (Isaac M AC). This specification on their phones helped them to video chat in real time so that they could see each other as they spoke.

*Thank God, for communication, we have Skype, internet, telecoms has made communication easier, but it's still not the same..., there are still some gaps, even when the man is there (on the other side of the device), you are still not communicating properly* (Chizo F EC).

Chizo lists different modes of communication apart from the phone which could make communicating easier, but maintains that there are limitations to these in that the communication link is impersonal and it does not help them to bond well.

Hertlein & Blumer (2014) assert that technology affects relationships differently. It used to be expensive to communicate using technology, but in recent times, seeing our loved ones via video calling and the web is available to people from different financial and social backgrounds. Technology helps to maintain relationships and communication across geographical boundaries, but in this study it was not found to be used extensively by the participants as it may be expensive (the local context is thus different), unfamiliar or experienced as impersonal.

Calls and texting may be more personal than new media such as Facebook and Twitter and hence they may not serve as an adequate bridge to meaningful communication among couples. In the next section this meaningful communication is reflected upon by certain participants.

#### **7.4 Reconnecting: Bonding, Connecting and Being Together**

Participants expressed their views and thoughts on being together, communicating and what it takes for couples to feel close during the times they are apart and on those occasions, they share a weekend or more together.

##### **7.4.1 Togetherness and Enjoying the Journey**

Feeling close to each other is difficult to maintain in commuter relationships and below certain participants provide insight into these situations:

*Communication is missing. We talk more jolly on the phone, but when we meet, it's like we are trying to reconnect, get to know ourselves again, like what is there to talk*

*about. I really don't like that communication gap. By the time he comes on Friday night, he is tired, Saturdays are usually filled with activities, Sundays, visitors come in and out and before you know it, it's Monday morning so you realize you hardly have time to talk, to have time to click... that communication gap is not good at all, I don't like it... I think it has strained it (the marital relationship). There are many things, I want to tell him, there is no time, one visitor is coming in, we are all tired by the time we go to bed, so there is something about it, it's strange to imagine that before we got married and in the early days of our marriage, we could talk and talk till about 4am, just having a good communication(Lumya F AC).*

*I guess of course, if you had your partner here, there would be that constant presence of the person, physical support, emotional support, just having someone there at the end of the day, we get to talk on the phone, but it's not, I don't think it's the same as when the person is physically there... I don't know what it has done (that is, the commuting to their marriage), we communicate and have always been able to communicate so I don't see that... problem. Maybe for me, it's just in my head, but it's like I said, if it was a case of we had stayed together, and I had known and enjoyed everything that my head is telling me, maybe I'm missing. I would be able to have a clearer picture of ooh this is what it was before and this is what it is now, but I really don't have that, so it's all just in my head that maybe if... I don't think there are any guarantees, you could actually have the person there in quote, do you understand? And nothing 'cos there is nothing there to compare it with, so I really can't say what it is or not (Uzo F AC).*

*If he were to be around, you get to immediately say, we need to talk about this and about this, but because he is not around, there are times you get upset because you need to talk now and he is not ready to talk, so what I do know is, the moment I catch him, I get him to talk..., I want quality time with him (Tina F EC).*

All three women reflected on how different their communication patterns are now compared to when they met their partners or when they were still living together. Tina's response is now to talk with her husband whenever she can as she gave up on the idea that there is "a right time to talk".

*It strains the relationship...I know it's horrible, when my husband was first transferred to Bauchi, I felt it, like a part of me was missing. That's when I knew that the bonding thing was important, you know that this is not right, it's not supposed to be like this...this has actually affected our marital relationship, we were closer, it was better than this. I don't know if it's because we are growing older but I know it was better when we were together, there is a great difference... our communication, everything is different. its better staying together (Chizo F EC).*

Chizo's opinion is that, it is better to be together as a couple as she says that as a couple, their relationship has been strained. She feels it is because they are growing older as a couple because as a younger couple and when they were together, she rates their communication level very highly. Moen (2001) describes Chizo's observation, concerning the drop in their communication, as a psychological turning point which is more frequent for women as they age.

*This talking thing (lack of communicating face-to-face) can be very terrible. He had already given the name for our daughter to be put on the birth certificate and the day I went to do the certificate, I called just to be sure, but he didn't pick so I went ahead and put the name just for him to return my call and after I told him, he was upset because he had changed his mind and we had to go do another certificate because that name he wanted was not there, so these are some of the things and they can be quite annoying(Praise F AC).*

Naming a child is an important life event in the life of a child and the family. It is the privilege and duty of the parents to name their child and the right of the child to be named (UNICEF 2003). The name of the child is usually given careful thought and consideration and is not taken lightly as in the Nigerian culture, it is believed that a name defines your destiny (Nwoye 2011). In Praise's family life course, this was an important transition for them as they negotiated the name of a new member of their family. What is also clear from the naming of the child is that the father was the one's wishes that had to be carried out by the mother, this indicates a patriarchal dominance which is true of the Nigerian context where the power of the father as the head of the household is held supreme (Makama,2013), the power dynamic is thus evident in this relationship.

*There are sometimes you want to say something you have an idea you want to share. Some things can't be transmitted by words; you need to be seeing the person physically for you to be understood. There are times you wish your wife was around, not always around friends, colleagues.... When we argue when I am around, it's easier to manage (Samson M AC).*

*Absence makes the heart grow fonder, it's true sometimes, but sometimes I look at it like when I'm around, we can communicate better (Emmanuel M AC).*

The responsibility of maintaining togetherness falls on women as they are naturally seen as carers and have the obligation to care since they remain with the children most times. Holmes (2004, pp.195-196) refers to this as 'emotion work' where 'gendered emotional labour' is usually undertaken by women, especially in distance relationships. The men also voiced the fact that communication was easier when they were together with their wives.

Lee (2015) and Bunker et al (1992) further describe couples being lonely and emotional when they need to talk to someone even if about mundane things when and the importance of having a partner to serve as a sounding board. These observations were confirmed in this study where couples described the emotional process of missing their partners and what they feel at those moments.

#### **7.4.2 'Stunted Growth': Time is of the Essence**

Some of the participants liken their commuter marriage to a phenomenon where an organism ought to be growing, but lacks certain nutrients, encountering stunted growth. For these participants, the basic nutrient missing from their relationship is time spent together. When their relationship is deprived of continuous time together, the relationship seems to be in reverse. Lee (2015) opines that seeing partners to share stories of the day at that moment is more valuable to commuter couples than sharing the story a week later where the event may not be relevant any longer. This kind of seemingly irrelevant situations not being addressed when it should have been, takes its toll on the marital relationship. Rabe (2001) corroborates that commuter couples in her study reported that they hardly had enough time to clear quarrels since they went their separate ways before the conflict could be resolved.

*Sometimes, when he comes back, it's like there is a gap between the period he is away, you are trying to amend things you've talked about before, it's like you've gone five steps behind instead of going forward. What you should have overcome before, you are revisiting, catching up on things (Dinah F AC).*

Her husband agrees with her and says that:

*A lot of the things we would have learned earlier because I took the job before we got married, there are a lot of things we should have learned before now about each other and maybe we would have gone past this stage, the stay apart during the first few years of marriage, affected our bonding time (Samson M AC).*

They both agree that being away from each other for long periods of time does not help their marital relationship. Other participants had similar sentiments:

*You lose intimacy between you and your wife, we communicate, but it's not the same thing.... any time, we see, it's like we have not seen for a long time (Henry M AC).*

*I think we could have grown more in knowing each other as we are now...I feel the more you are with somebody, the better you get to know them, sometimes not being around, breaks the time of getting to know my wife and it's not the same... getting each other's bullshit and getting it over with, could get lost or cause a break. Sometimes we could be sitting with each other and not talking, it's part of communication too and it's ok. Some people feel when we are apart from each other it's good cause you take a break from each other, but I don't see it that way, I feel we should know each other and move forward, like now, I know some of my wife's issues and I've moved on with it (Emmanuel M AC).*

*It makes bonding in the marriage take a longer time, if he were here, it would not matter so much what I say. The learning and adjustment process takes a long time. I've been married eight years, but it does not seem like I've moved, some little thing we should have gotten over, we are still on, we are still fighting and subsequently, like for the decisions I have to make and he is not around, you find that with time we take decisions independent of each other without consulting one another and this could be*



*an issue sometimes. We forget to tell ourselves the decisions we took and these could lead to some serious arguments*(Michelle F AC).

Michelle links her decision-making process with their ability to be one as a couple. The fact that they make decisions independently and forget to tell each about it buttresses the point that they are not bonded. This individual independence may be the cause of their arguments.

*Withdrawal and communication gap, not being able to say what you want to say or looking for a way to say it when ordinarily, you would have just said it. It shows that the distance is having an impact on the marriage, you are supposed to tell him everything without any fear or arranging things, you don't want to hurt him or say something that will create doubt because you have not been together* (Paula F EC).

Paula is still grappling with a way to talk to her husband about certain things. This is coming thirteen years into their marriage. She knows that this is because they have not been around each other for a long time and so they have not mastered each other's miens. She mentions several factors that have been taken away by like lack of communication to include withdrawal and a communication gap.

Couples need to work out their marriages to bring the relationship to a point they desire. Many of the participants are adjusting couples, at a stage in their marriages where they need to understand each other and grow as a couple, which requires time. This period of time in their life course trajectory as a couple will subsequently have multiple transitions as they take on new roles. In a commuter marriage situation where they do not have sufficient time to nurture their relationship, they feel frustrated and know that the relationship is not the anticipated place it should be. This is commendable, as this knowledge and the present frustration they feel makes them want to do all it takes to nurture their marriage and do all they can to end this phase of their journey. The couples communication trajectory points to determining a closer marital closeness and moving away from marital breakdown. This assumption is evident in the preceding sections.

### **7.4.3 Trust and Fidelity**

Couples talk about issues of trust in the marriage as well as giving instances of sexual advances that they have been faced with. Emmanuel talks about himself while Michelle narrates her

husband's experiences. Other couples talk about their family or friends hinting that a commuter marriage leaves room or is vulnerable to infidelity:

*My husband has told me of advances by women, they come to the bank to look for them. Sometimes they fill out a teller and it is their phone number. Sometimes you get sexual advances from colleagues and sexual urges of your own... there are issues of trust and faithfulness(Michelle F AC).*

*It has not been easy, where I am, the women are brash, bold, they talk about sleeping with me having sex, seduction. They will even tell you they want to sleep with you, you just want to be friends no strings attached, but they don't see it like that (Emmanuel M AC).*

Tina also shares how her dad had an extramarital affair when he worked away from home for a time. In chapter 5 she mentioned that her family, especially her mum was concerned and wanted them to be together in order to avoid extramarital affairs.

*My parents had a time of separation at some point in their marriage for about six years just before he died. My dad had an extramarital affair that almost cost them their marriage (Tina F EC).*

*I know that not all men are sincere, I know some men commute to stay away from their responsibilities and some cheat on their wives... I will speak for most men, not all men, because some can be jerks, I had to speak to one recently, I mean, me that can be financially reckless, I asked him if he had sorted out the house before all this spending (he was doing on friends and drinks)(Isaac M AC).*

Times of separation physically or emotionally from your spouse is one way in which extramarital affairs can start. Extramarital relationships can become turning points that may rock the foundations of a marriage and thereby altering the trajectory of the couple's life course. It could also breed distrust and hatred in a marriage leading to divorce and having a terrible impact on the children from that union(Hawkins & Fackrell 2011). The knowledge of what an extramarital affair can do to a marriage may inform the participants' view of abstaining from such an endeavour. This shows their families mean a great deal to them and they do all they can to work out their marriage as seen in previous sections.

#### **7.4.4 Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Special Times, Special Things and Deliberate Acts**

Couples describe how the time apart makes them feel towards their partners, what they do during the times they are together and the investments and deliberate acts they perform for their partners to aid the marital relationship.

*I like the fact that I can look forward to seeing my husband, prepare for his coming, I have not seen him for a while and all that...one of the beautiful things about it is you can bring in some romance into the whole thing, because, you no longer take the person for granted, it's like the person is always there all the time and all of a sudden it becomes obvious that if the person is not there, you need the person... I think I would still appreciate his being around more than his always having to be away (Tina F EC).*

*Sometimes, when he is around, I feel burdened to do the best, as in, my husband is around, let me do this, let me do that, I don't know, if I'm the one disturbing myself or what, when he is not around, I do those things I've not done, use the opportunity to do what I want (Dinah F AC).*

Dinah describes a situation where she shuts down other activities for the sake of her husband. She says when he is around, she feels burdened to do her best and keep him comfortable. This behaviour was also reported by other female participants. Wives show a lot of concern towards their husbands (Holmes 2004; Erickson 2005), helping them achieve success in their chosen careers and also making them happy and satisfied. This is a part of the gendered life course where women's lives are linked with others. Sometimes domestic labour, especially cooking skills, are used to strengthen their relationships with their husbands:

*Get something special for your spouse. I always ask him, what can I cook? and I do special things (Linda F AC).*

*I try to do special stuff and do it differently at weekends for example, the normal Sunday rice, I cook on Saturdays so he can eat well. My husband does not eat and I admire men that eat, so I try to help him (Rebekah F EC).*

Rebekah alludes to a Nigerian custom of cooking special rice for families on Sundays. To make it special, she cooks it on Saturday so she can have the pleasure of seeing her husband eat

properly before he goes back to Abuja. Also, because eating rice is kind of a Sunday ritual, making it on the Saturdays her husband is around makes that meal and everything around it special. Rebekah adds another reason for cooking elaborately for her husband:

*I cook for him to take back when he comes for weekend. I don't like him eating out for several reasons hygiene, fun (Rebekah F EC).*

By “fun” Rebekah means he could get used to hanging out in eateries and restaurants where he could meet random friends or women, which could lead to extramarital affairs or some sort of trouble.

In certain cases, the time spent away from each other is seen in a positive light:

*The distance allows us [to] miss each other. I thought about one time we were together for a long period and got into an argument, she was in a mood and I was also in a mood and I remember thinking thank God, I'm leaving on Monday. I said if I can hold my peace till Monday, it will be over and by the time I come back, it will be over. I kind of imagine that couples who are around each other all the time, kind of have it harder than we do. The first year is the honeymoon, you can't get enough of each other, but as time goes on and things become tougher... you become grateful for the intermittent break, so a positive aspect is missing each other (Isaac M AC).*

*Sometimes in order for you to appreciate somebody, the person should be absent for a while. Sometimes you don't know the value of what you have till it's gone. I think this is one of the positive aspects of this relationship for me, it's making me appreciate my husband and family more and realizing that we can't always be together forever so the time we have together, we should make the best use of it. It's giving me an extra push to make the relationship better, seeing how to fill in the gap by being better people, better spouses, going the extra mile, not complaining about things that are not going well, doing it and getting the appreciation (Lumya F AC).*

Isaac and Lumya present the aspect of missing their respective spouses in a positive light. Isaac says that the distance allows him and his wife to clear up their arguments and miss each other; while Lumya says that the absence her and her husband appreciate each other more. She says she does not allow complaints about things that are not going well get the better of the relationship.

*I support my wife in her job and small business because God forbid, I can't provide or come short, I need to know she can handle the family financially and also be in the best mind psychologically to support the family...sometimes I think it is hard on them which is why, when I come, I do the school runs... I know she misses me and all the physical needs but she is quite an independent person and I don't take it for granted which is why I do my part when I'm around (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac is deliberate in his support of his wife and her job. This is a very deliberate and calculated attempt by him to be assured that if anything happens to him, she will be able to support the family.

Bunker et al (1992) says that the repeated separations and reunions in a commuter marriage could put tensions in a marriage, but Bowers, Wiley, Jones, Ogolsky & Branscomb (2014) explain that showing sensitivity to the needs of partners and planning and spending enjoyable time together are good examples of partner practices that may promote positivity and healthy relationship satisfaction. These partner practices help to express emotional support and encourage bonding. The partners in this study have identified several other practices that help them have a healthy relationship despite their repeated separations. These couples highlight what they do consciously for each other in their marriages, having found a new trajectory in their life course as a couple.

## **7.5 The Practice of Marriage**

In chapter 3, it was argued that in a commuter marriage, spouses generally engage in non-traditional roles, taking on different duties such as men cooking and women doing more school runs. Data collected and analysed proved that this is true to some extent. This section looks closely at how the gender division of labour is perceived by commuter couples. However, in different sections of this study, we find various interactions of gender, social class and cultural norms. Govaerts & Dixon (1988); Anderson & Spruill (1993); Roslan et al (2013) argue that couples who engage in non-traditional gender roles do not necessarily bother about what society has to say about that as it could introduce self-respect and confidence among couples. This may be true, but it was observed that due to the changing nature of society and the non-traditional aspects of the commuter marriage, there seems to be conflict in the performance of conjugal roles in the home and marriage of commuter couples. There are certain real expectations of

wives of their husbands and vice versa. These expectations challenge the traditionally ascribed roles of men and women, leading to conflict and emotional stress.

Erickson (2005) surmises that emotion work is a distinct type of family work (i.e., the routine activities that feed, clothe, shelter, and care for both children and adults as well as listening, making special arrangements, worrying, discussing, feeling and so forth). Emotion work also comprises of various theoretical perspectives including the gender construction theory. The gender construction theory posits that women continue to perform the bulk of routine housework and child care, and to feel more responsible than men for this work regardless of income, time constraints, or ideology. This also links to the gendered life course perspective which highlights gender as a key component affecting the nature of work and career paths.

Worthy of mention is the fact that in as much as new couples expect each other to help out in their various roles, women seem to be moving towards an egalitarian attitude of sharing roles. Yet, there are still roles that are expected to be handled by women: taking care of children, including bathing, caring for sick children, doing homework with them, and the cooking, including going to the market (most times on a budget and with a sense to manage the family's resources), serving, washing up dishes and similar activities. Even when women say their husbands help in the home, it may not be more than a babysitting role. This is where the services of domestic workers are sought.

There is also the “fairness” of the handling of the chores. Michelle may be expressing this when she says:

*I expect him to be helping out in the kitchen or with homework and I find him sleeping. I have to bear and understand and not compare him with others... I'm saying, I've had a long week and I've been expecting you to come and lend a hand at least (Michelle F AC).*

This also brings conflict and conflicting emotions in the negotiations as women are more aware of the inequity in household labour and having the potential of disrupting marital togetherness (Rogers & Amato 2000) seeing they spend more time doing household chores and also contribute financially to the home. Coltrane (2004, p.218) however, counters this by saying:-

‘...whereas women tend to perform domestic labour to meet the demands necessitated by the presence of children and husbands. We do know that when men perform more of the routine housework, employed women feel that the division of labour is fairer, are less depressed, and enjoy higher levels of marital satisfaction.’

### **7.5.1 Men’s Roles and Women’s Expectations**

The roles men are expected to perform according to their wives are examined below.

*Anything I can’t handle, he comes around and does it. Like sometimes, I have to wait a while, if my car has issues, I will wait for him, but I generally don’t have major issues with the car since I don’t really go anywhere apart from work (Saratu F AC).*

*We usually share responsibilities of what to do, when he comes at the weekend or two weeks’ time, if something goes wrong when he is around, he will call the vendor (most likely the skilled person to carry out the repairs needed, such as the plumber) to come (Praise F AC).*

Saratu and Praise expressly declare that their husbands handle issues they cannot handle on their own, even if it means they have to wait for their husbands.

*I hate the fact that I do the running around and the things that he should do, like changing bulbs, doing wiring things, that I have to take decisions... I’m the man and the woman, sometimes, I even cry about it and take it to God in prayer and ...no matter how you try to fit in and work hard you realise there is a gap in the way things should be, there is a place for mum and dad, sometimes, the kids come back and say why can’t dad drop or pick us from school? (Michelle F AC).*

*We started as a long-distance couple right from courtship... I had to be the woman and man at the same time, despite that I wish there were times he was around (Paula F EC).*

Paula and Michelle make distinctions between chores, according to gender and feel overwhelmed by having to perform all the tasks. Dinah and Linda have similar gender specific ideas about families:

*The truth about it is that it’s not easy for a couple to be apart, you get to be the mother and father and it is more challenging for the woman you get to make decisions put things in place (Dinah F AC).*

Dinah also laments being the mother and father to her children, especially when it comes to making decisions.

*His not being around is not easy, most times my younger sister that is staying with me, plays the husband role, she goes gets water, she does electricals, gen (generator), sometimes it's always good for a man to be around to see to some of these things...When he is not there, I get frustrated (Linda F AC).*

Linda, who was pregnant with twins at the time of the interview states that her sister plays the “husband role” when her husband is not around, performing tasks that require muscle and energy (Linda’s sisters support is discussed further in chapter 8).

*Doing all the running around, the thinking, the electricity and other things I would not ordinarily think about I'm beginning to concentrate on(Lumya F AC).*

Lumya does not particularly like doing the electricals which includes putting on the generator when there is a power outage and other chores that the husband should be doing.

*If he was around I think I would be more relaxed... to help me with little things around. I needed a new rechargeable lamp. I asked him to buy one but he forgot. The one we have is faulty, but this weekend he came in on Saturday and not Friday so the time was limited to do stuff...Like the last public holiday, he was to come on Wednesday evening, he was on his way when they called from headquarters that he had to do something so he turned back and came the next day. Also, when he comes there are things to do, mechanics etc, before you know it the time is gone and not much has really been done (Rebekah F EC).*

It is clear that men generally do electrical related tasks and wives expect help in that area and find these tasks challenging if their husbands are not there.

*I see the need to be there, she (his wife) complains about the generator, electricals and so on and I don't like that...sometimes she will complain and say if you were around, you will help me do certain things and really if I was there, I will reduce her stress... there was a time, someone borrowed the sound system in Lagos, when the person brought it back, they could not fix it so they could not watch/listen to anything till I got to Lagos (Henry M AC).*



Henry corroborates the electrical task that men are expected to handle by saying he sees why he should be in Lagos with his wife. His wife complains about her helplessness in carrying out electrically related tasks. These views confirm the gendered nature of household labour despite somewhat changing gender roles.

### **7.5.2 Male Provider**

That men should provide financially for their families is an underlying assumption by many, if not all participants. Some participants give a practical example of how men provide and how they play their roles.

*He is just ready to become a man, what will he do if he comes? Will he just be looking at us? If he can't provide for us, there will still be trouble, it affects him seriously and he hates it and he's not there and really wants to be around, but he hates being away from home and if he does not provide he will not be happy... Provide is the key word here because it is the man's responsibility (Michelle F AC).*

*Yes, I know men should provide, one of the issues with my mum was that she became bitter when she realized my dad could not provide and she antagonized him, she was working and it was wrong for her to carry that pressure by herself and in her mind, it was unacceptable and she did not handle it well (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac and Michelle discuss practically how the male provider role, which is really a gender role has played out in their various families. The Nigerian society and much of the wider world hold the male provider role in a very strict sense (Okeke 1997; Richter 2006; Bankole & Adeyeri 2014). Women resent being in that position, especially if there is no major reason to be in it like illness or death of the husband. Michelle notes that if her husband cannot provide for them, he would be miserable and see himself as having failed as that will make him an irresponsible husband. Isaac talks about his mother being bitter because she had to provide for the household when his father was not working and she bore the burden.

These cases have been highlighted to show that in Nigeria, as has been observed by Okeke (1997) over two decades ago, women are still not expected to bear the burden of financial care. This role is for the head of the house who is believed should be the man. The woman's contribution to the home is usually supplementary. A responsible man proudly provides for his

household. These submissions are upheld based on the historical patriachal structure enthrenced in the Nigerian society, the male patriach who is perceived to be the head of the household, based on the belief of superiority is seen as the controller of resources while the woman and her contributions are seen as inferior. These gender dimensions are at play in the Nigerian society and are a part of the national milieu. Gender roles are constructed through family centered relationships related to roles and responsible carried out by each sex in society(Asiyanbola 2005; Makama 2013).The themes of partriachy and gender among commuter couples run concurrently in this chapter and the preceeding one. This determines the differences in their responses and actions towards household chores and finances. The themes are explored again in chapter nine when fatherhood is discussed.

### **7.5.3 Women's Roles and Men's Expectations**

Isaac feels wives should be supportive of their husbands. That should be a standard role of a good wife.

*I think for men after your career the next big decision is getting a good wife, I can't judge my father for his mistakes because his time was different but I learned not to make the same mistake as him... if I was my dad, I won't marry my mum she was not the most encouraging of wives and that support is key, wives should learn to support and husbands should learn to communicate your vision and so the wife will be able to be sacrifice towards that vision (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac highlights a very important point about the husband being the visionary of the family and not just the provider. As a visionary, the husband has to clearly articulate where the family is headed in such a way that the wife can support the vision, and the family achieve its goal. This partnership is held dear in many marriages and in many cases, leads to stability in the home although it is clearly part of a patriarchal approach to family where men cast themselves as leaders. A further point of consideration is that Isaac regards his career decision as more important than finding a wife, underscoring that for him, family life can only follow once a career has been chosen. The wife, in his view, should primarily take on a supportive role in the family.

*And there were times that he would come and I would feel like, I have to live in the kitchen now, but if that was part of my life, I wouldn't be thinking it was odd* (Ruth F AC).

Ruth's view here is that because her husband is around, she has to impress him, she has to cook for him, hence her thinking "*I have to live in the kitchen now*". This thinking is a combination of factors. First of all, her role as a wife, which is expected to cook more regularly where she has not been cooking. Secondly, compared to other couples who have at least two months interval between visits, she has just one visit a year and is used to catering for herself on her own terms. Gross (1983), when referring to marine wives, also described marine wives feeling restricted from the independence they were used to when the husband came around and began to exert his authority.

*I am grateful for how my parents brought us up, we could cook, we could drive, there was no boy, no girl, so when I found myself in this situation I was not helpless or have to depend on anyone. My mum was a multitasker and I have found that I had to multitask a lot. I'm grateful for the way I was brought up, because I said even if you have all the money to get the workers, etc, if you don't know how to do it and what standard you want, how will you show them* (Ruth F EC).

Ruth evoking her own socialisations as a child, indicates that her parents brought them up in a way where all the children could play all the assigned gender roles. She also states the value of knowing what to do and how to do it so you can properly guide the people you employ to do the job.

In as much as there are specific gender roles that couples expect each other to fulfil, there is an assumption that since couples are not together, they can help each other accomplish their roles as they are not there to do it in person. For example, the driving of the children to school, which is presumed to be the father's responsibility since she (the wife) is the one who bathes and feeds them.

Commuter couples, due to the nature of their relationship, appear to have become less traditional in their handling of traditionally assigned roles which single residence couples may still subscribe to. Commuter couples get used to handling the roles of the other spouse since they are

not there to perform it, such as men cooking and women dealing with electrical equipment. This is done solely because the spouses are not there.

Where spouses talk about the difficulty and dislike of performing the tasks that they feel are not theirs to perform, and the comparison to a specialized division of labour that is akin to a traditional marriage, it further confirms the earlier assumption that commuter couples see their marriages as a traditional marriage and that they take up their gender specific roles as soon as they are together. From the submissions of the participants in this study, that earlier assumption is upheld even though it is gradually changing as husbands and wives reverse roles.

## **7.6 Commuter Wives and Their Household Chores**

From the foregoing discussion on gender roles, this section gives a peek into the work women do on a daily basis. Nigerian women have been said to have a “triple workload” (Nwabara 1989) because of the housework they do, catering to the family’s needs as well their paid employment. Women in this research report that they spend a considerable amount of time on chores and household tasks such as bathing the children and dropping them off at school as well as on mental planning to accomplish these chores. The way they report their performance of these chores suggests that they go to bed thinking about the next day and getting the children ready on time.

Participants indicate that they plan and organize activities ahead of time to determine which approach to a task works best. For example, Rebekah sometimes uses the services of an auto-rickshaw and driver to take her children to school when she feels tired, especially after taking care of her sick children. She mentioned that sometimes, she plans ahead so she is able to drive the children to school and not use the rickshaw as it is a cheaper option.

This multitasking and mental planning exerts a lot of energy and may go unnoticed in many homes and among women themselves. Lee (2005) and Lee & Waite (2005) determine that routine household tasks are mostly performed by women in a household; there is no flexibility in getting them accomplished. These tasks include those mentioned above such as cooking, laundry and cleaning which are more time consuming with another two to three hours spent thinking about executing a task, this mental labour shows how important that task is as it is usually done while executing physical labour.

Performance of household tasks is aggravated by the lack of modern appliances. In Nigeria water and power supply may be erratic and cannot be depended on thereby dauntingly influencing the amount of time and energy that goes into simple everyday chores such as cooking meals which may demand going to the market daily as power supply is low. A family may be able to afford modern appliances and even have domestic help but the burden of not having adequate power and water supply does take its toll on the family, particularly the wife/mother thereby adding to stress (see Aryee 2005). Okeke (1997) asserts that despite their earnings women are expected to be directly involved in domestic work. This takes a heavy energetic task on employed mothers in urban Nigeria. Although the tasks in themselves may thus seem relatively easy, the social realities form an environment that is challenging and has to be taken into account as is explained within the life course approach.

### **7.6.1 House Chores**

House chores include cooking / meal preparation, going to the market to buy groceries, setting things in order ahead of the week such as planning the meals, taking out what to wear to work. Laundry and ironing were not reported to be done by participants as these chores were mostly done by employed staff. These tasks done by employed staff are time consuming, impersonal and require a lot of energy. Even though the women in the commuter couples are thus overburdened, the help they receive is of importance as it eases their burden.

As alluded in previous sections, this gives credence to the gendered life course perspective used in the research, where societal norms and gender dimensions interact. To do laundry, modern appliances like the washing machine are not used in most households due to the unreliable power and water supply and also the fact that there is someone employed for this job. Rebekah mentioned having a washing machine and also having someone come in on certain days to take care of the laundry. Participants report that laundry usually took four to five hours a week in a typical household.

*Also, since I don't have a house help (referring to a live-in house help), I do the chores for example, preparing school lunches, cleaning and ironing, at night when the children are asleep (Rebekah F EC).*

Meals (as discussed in chapter 5) were most times prepared by the mothers even when they indicate that they employ domestic workers. Meal preparation as referenced in the time diaries

included preparing meals for the household and making school lunches for children. It is safe to assume that this task is given more of a priority when husbands are around. The act of cooking in one household in a day took about three to four hours. This time does not include grocery shopping.

### **7.6.2 Child Care**

Uzo, Natalie, Michelle and Praise were breastfeeding mothers at the time of the interview. Uzo, Natalie and Praise were caring for their first babies who were not yet a year old. Michelle also had a baby, but this was her third child and unlike the other three mothers, she was not overwhelmed with having a new baby. The other mothers reported taking care of their babies and waking up and feeding their babies as very crucial part of their days, Michelle talked more about helping the children with homework and other events. This may be because she was used to the routine and had a live-in nanny specifically to help with the baby and another help to handle domestic chores who came on a daily basis.

*Now that I have the baby, it's about waking up, feed her, she sleeps. I've been trying to work from home. I'm on leave, but there are somethings I collected from people and that has been slow, because you can't give it your full attention, she wakes up and I have to abandon it because she's priority. Once she sleeps, I try to get those things done, paperwork, computer stuff, if I can, I dash to CAC <sup>13</sup>if I can and leave her with my brother. As per her routine, she can give you four hours, I leave her with my brother and rush to do what I need to do in that four hours, I also try to have my bath in those four hours, feed her, feed her, feed her, take care of her, take care of her, take of her, eat lunch. It's usually me and her and my brother because everyone is working, but I warm something for breakfast, there is usually something in the fridge for lunch, feed her again and basically the day just goes. Most of my day is taken up by baby (Uzo F AC).*

*She has two children to take care of, how she manages sometimes is beyond me. There was a day she went to church and left me with the kids, when she came back, I said [you are really trying] (Samson M AC).*

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<sup>13</sup>Cooperate Affairs Commission in charge of registering companies and businesses. She is a cooperate lawyer.

*I have two children, one is at school. I prepare the one at school for school, feeding and bathing. The one at home I bath and sometimes she only wants your attention (Dinah F AC).*

*My son takes up the time, I take him to school, come back, take his lunch for 1pm and then go back to pick him for 3pm (Linda F AC).*

*We are bathing, getting ready for school, at night, it's so busy, bathing kids, doing homework, getting dinner (Michelle F AC).*

Preparing children for school was seen as a part of childcare including driving them to school, and making their breakfast and feeding them. The time it took to do these tasks was between two to three hours excluding breastfeeding/ night time feeding which mothers woke up to do at night for about two hours or more.

Another highlight of childcare is what participants indicate as 'school runs.' This entails taking/driving the children to school and is seen as a major task for women.

*I miss his presence where he can help me do certain things like school runs. At least he can drop them in the mornings and I pick them up after I have settled down a bit. But now I have to get moving (Rebekah F EC).*

Most schools in Jos do not have school bus services and car-pooling is not a culture most people in Jos imbibe. Also during times of petrol scarcity, women must consider queuing up for petrol as well as the time it takes and the amount of money it will take to buy the petroleum products at almost double or more of the price. The nature of the roads is something to consider because potholes and traffic jams on the roads could make driving tiring and contribute to the wear and tear of the car. Akanji (2012) in a study on achieving work life balance in Nigeria also alludes to the bad motorways in Nigeria leading to unsatisfactory childcare engagements.

This is the reality of the middle-class woman in Nigeria who is doing her best for her family. Her experiences may be the same as her counterparts in more developed countries, but their trajectories are different when compared with the systems govern their societies. In as much as commuter women in Nigeria and in developed societies are both middle class and working women, Western women may never deal with some of the socio-economic realities of Nigerian such as constant bad roads and petrol scarcity.

## 7.7 Conclusion

The expectation that couples have of each other shows a changing perception of traditionally assigned gender roles. These expectations do not necessarily mean that the change is happening rapidly as wives still do much more than men in terms of housework and taking on a pseudo provider role when they manage the family resources, contribute to household finances from the work that they do outside the home and also provide emotional and physical care for husbands who are away most times. Children are their mothers' main responsibility once fathers are away and many times when they are around. The active time and energy it takes to provide emotional support to members of the family is an important aspect of the work that takes place in commuter families

Expectations and desires; likes and dislikes; and roles in gendered manner, of husbands and wives, on what they feel their partners should be doing, has been considered in this chapter. There are some roles that are socially deemed feminine and some masculine, the world over and the Nigerian society is not excluded. Many of the socially assigned gender roles emanate from the biological attributes of the different sexes such as women bearing and breastfeeding children. These roles have been entrenched in the culture and members of society have been socialized to accept them. This attribution may lead to gender stereotypes and in the Nigerian society, this categorisation is motivated by the patriarchal system in the society where men feel they have more power and authority than women (Makama 2013; Agbamu 2016; Fakunmoju, Bammeké, Oyekanmi, Temilola & George 2016).

The participants have identified these roles in the context of their perceptions, culture and society. Women and mothers are placed in a different and a more encompassing parenting role than men. Some of the men had earlier talked about not liking to cook because they view this as effeminate. Some of the women view some roles they are required to handle as burdensome because their husbands and the rightful owners of these roles are not around to play their parts. The male participants in this study demonstrate how they are socially engineered to be the providers, but that can be challenged in a commuter relationship where some wives contribute a meaningful financial portion to household affairs. As a result of this, some of the responses to the idea and the reality of doing the role of the other person usually have the phrase, "*I don't like...*" or "*I hate...*" because carrying out of the assigned role is burdensome, the spouse carrying the



role does not feel equipped to carry it out or does not feel they should be the one doing or more likely feels they have done their part or more than their fair share.

Nigeria is still a very traditional society and citizens have been socialized to know that the different sexes have their different roles to play, the flip side of the teaching is that many citizens do not realize that gender roles are not sex roles as some of the roles that they think they cannot handle does not really require anything in their biological makeup. For the couples interviewed in this research they have knowingly or unknowingly opted for an egalitarian power relationship and have non-traditional gender role attitudes as they share and switch roles when they are away from each other. This switch is however not very clear and highly contested even as the couples in this study have shown.

There seems to be a very gradual move towards a more egalitarian household in Nigeria even as many women are still more embedded in the home and family affairs compared to men (Akintayo 2006). It seems like a vacillating situation where there is a move towards egalitarian households and women are still entrenched in home and family affairs; a case of 'the more things change, the more they remain the same'. This new attitude and role reversal may disturb marital harmony as couples expect their spouses to step out of traditionally defined gender roles. This disruption by role reversals, may only be experienced in certain areas of the marriage such as division of labour and not in other aspects of the marriage such as communication for instance.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **COMMUTER COUPLES AND THEIR SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In chapter 7, the theme of communication and marriage practices was analysed in a bid to find out how commuter marriage couples cope. The reversed gender roles commuter couples engage in and the impact it has on the marriage was also explored. The social support networks available to commuter couples and how they use them are explored in this chapter as a follow up to answering the second research question raised.

Social support networks can create places of refuge through which individuals and families can experience ways of reducing and coping with negative stressors in the workplace and at home. This support can be instrumental where actual help is rendered, such as childcare or helping with a task, or it could be emotional, such as when caring or sympathetic behaviours are displayed. This support, could come from work or non-work sources such as co-workers or family (Ayman & Antani 2008). As a commuting family, access to social resources makes a difference in the life course of the family as social support is crucial and provides a foundation to go through various transitions in the life course as it relates to linked lives and social ties.

Four categories of social support were identified and discussed under the following subthemes: Family support, employers' support, domestic help, and religious activities including prayers and church attendance. Negative forms of support amongst friends were also found and are discussed in a later section.

#### **8.2 Family Support**

In traditional and collectivistic societies of which Nigeria is one, the support of extended family, friends and neighbours are almost taken for granted. Aryee (2005) identifies distinctive features of the family in urban sub-Saharan Africa, of which Jos is a prototype, to have relations with elderly parents and the extended family, as well as employed domestic workers who constitute support for a working family. The social support is an effective tool for many professional women. Almost all the participants who were interviewed have one or both of the spouse's

parents, relatives and a wide array of friends and networks nearby. This is one of the key reasons identified in this research as to why the primary home is in Jos and families do not consider moving away.

Bernas & Major (2000) state that stress is prevented when individuals cultivate their social resources and form a support system acknowledging that certain relationships can be a beneficial resource, and as such the family emotional support is the first resource identified by them. Akanji (2012) found that women seek solutions to their work-life balance by outsourcing childcare responsibilities to parents and relatives to help out when they are at work and also employ the services of domestic workers for household chores and general domestic labour. These findings are consistent with this present study. The following reports narrate the invaluable help of family members.

*My parents take care of the baby, pick her up [from] school, stay with her till I get back from work, they also feed me and house me, they take care of me and their granddaughter ...She (their daughter) has [a]grandma and grandpa and she's ok with that and she's coping very well... basically it's me and the baby, and grandma and grandpa are taking care of the baby, so I really can't say I have complaints (Saratu F AC).*

Isaac, her husband, continues by saying:

*My daughter got good love and she is surrounded by family... she could stay with grandma, grandpa, uncles and aunties... I know, it's not as harsh as it would have been if she was not surrounded by family and it's not as hard as it would have been for my wife if she was not with family, that's why I have not been so much in a hurry to move them from my in-law's place (to their own house) ... and I think you should really check into the family you are going into before you marry (Isaac M AC).*

*Family members... My brother helps around the house, doing heavy-duty stuff, changing bulbs, carrying things especially when I was pregnant. Family well... which is why I'm here... they've provided the help for that initial period of having a new baby, helping out, teaching me, knowing what is wrong with her, I dread going back to my house where I know it's just me and her, even when there is a house help, it's not just the same. It's not the same, there is that love, it won't be telling the house help, carry her, family like having her around, they love it. It's not a job(for her family), you feel comfortable*

*leaving without looking back, no harm is going to come her way 'cos you know she's in good hands (Uzo F AC).*

*My family has been amazing, the house helps didn't work out so much, but my parents have been tremendous, there was a time, I had to work and my parents were more than willing to pick the kids and there was a time I was not working so I was with the kids. When the kids were with my parents, I could go to sleep because I mean, they raised me so... my family has been extremely supportive, my dad and brothers are my sons' hero's (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth mentions that her husband was driven to provide for his family and it has cost them their marriage (see chapters 5 & 7). She asserts that her family was in Jos and if need be she could go to them for food, but her husband did not see it that way. Being that he came from a polygamous home where children and wives had to vie for the father's attention and scheme to get what they wanted, he never wanted that for his family, whereas Ruth's family was close-knit and she did not understand her husband's drive for a very long time. This she states almost cost them their marriage and caused a rift in the relationship.

*My sister is there but she's also busy. Sometimes I just take them all to my dad's house and leave them there with his house help and we just juggle from there. My mother-in-law has helped a lot in situations I have to be away for a long while. Family is it basically, If I wasn't in Jos, it would have been unimaginable, but I would have found a way (Lumya F AC).*

*My family members and parents are my support system, unfortunately for me, my husband is not from Plateau (State) so I don't have relatives from his side to rely on. He doesn't even know people here, so it's my family that does everything, if I have to pick the children and I'm in a tight spot, I can just call them and I know, somehow, they will look for a way to help me out, everything is them...the day I went into labour for my last baby, it was my dad who took me to the hospital... truly if not for my parents augmenting in this area, I would have packed up and gone most probably (Michelle F AC).*

*Most of our family and friends frown about it, but my elder brother is happy because he feels that since my family is here I will also move back. Since the crisis started (referring to the religious violence that erupted in Jos, highlighted in chapter 4), he doesn't feel safe*

*with me being in Jos. Her (his wife's) mum is not happy we are apart, but for the peace of mind that her daughter is nearby (Henry M AC).*

*My younger sister that is staying with me... My aunt helps me when I have to go back for lectures which is a reason we choose the school near her and where her own kids go as well. We are used to the arrangement now (Linda F AC).*

Linda has her aunt and sister who are family members helping her with her domestic chores. Her sister lives with her and is not a paid staff. She also has her aunt helping her with the school runs, unlike Michelle and sometimes Rebekah, who pay a non-family member to help with the school runs.

*I thank God that at some point in time, I had my niece at some point in time, she helped reduce the burden (Dinah F AC).*

Participants narrate how family has helped them live out their day-to-day lives, by supporting them in a variety of ways, most especially in the area of childcare and some domestic chores. The invaluable aid makes them realize that truly there are things money cannot buy. For instance, Uzo compares the help her house-help will render versus what her mum and brother do out of love.

Lumya makes a poignant statement which shows that if the families had to transfer to where the husbands are working, the wives may not cope as they do now. As their families may not be present there to offer the help and support they currently enjoy.

For some participants though, such as Henry, family members may not really approve of their being apart, but they encourage and support them through the hard days and that is really what matters for the commuter couples in this study. Some family members validate and understand why a couple is commuting and encourage them that it is only for a while or as Natalie says of her relatives who tell her that a commuter marriage is a '*form of training*' to be independent.

*Family thinks it's normal, all my sisters are in a commuter marriage, so If I'm not, they'll think it's strange... Just that their distances are not as long as mine (Saratu F AC).*

Saratu goes on to state another aspect of family support that is equally priceless. If Saratu's family see this as being the norm, then she is able to accept it and live her life normally because she has their support and affirmation and does not need to feel guilty or have to explain all the

time to her family. This is a major area where family support is appreciated because they understand the circumstances.

Crow & Maclean (2004), in their discussion on social support in local communities, assert that social support from kin usually comes from women, while also stating that social support does not come only from kin, but also from friends and neighbours who are an integral part of people's everyday life even though assistance from kin tends to have more lasting value. They continue by stating that social support takes various forms such as undertaking unpaid care and providing moral support.

The participants in this study testify in line with Crow & Maclean's (2004) statements that they have enjoyed several forms of support from their families and can rely on their parents to take care of them and their children. Participants in reporting about the help they received from their parents do not necessarily talk about exchanging support services, but it can be assumed that they also do so much for their parents and relatives as well. Mabry et al (2004) writing from the USA, points out that adult children and their parents share a significant solidarity where they exchange various kinds of support, the emotional support being the greatest given by parents followed by help with childcare and financial assistance and that parents tend to give more help than they receive until they are about age 75.

Widmer (2004, p.363) outlines certain types of networks such as the partcentric networks where men have more friends and family than women and the matricentric networks where the wife has more friends and family than the husband who are willing to support. The author has also identified a bicentric network, which is characterised by overlapping personal networks by both spouses and a unicentric network defined by one partner having dominance in terms of network resources. Women tend to have unicentric networks due to the emphasis they place on kinship structures. The women in this research, however show that they are more matricentric in that most of their own family live in Jos and not the husband's family. The women, mostly turn to their own parents and relatives for support.

Viers & Prouty (2001) state that maintaining two careers leads to a decreased network of family and friends and men interacting less with friends and family due to work overload. This also means men are more likely to lose out on extended family support, unlike women. This applies to male participants in this study in that, they are hardly around and when they come, they hardly

have time to meet up with family and friends leading to increased inability to meet social obligations and expectations from family.

Crow & Maclean (2004) are of the opinion that rising standards of living and mobility tends to loosen ties to local communities and kin, yet younger mothers remain connected to local support. This observation can be compared to the young mothers who participated in this research. These women, stay in the primary residence of the couple to work and take care of their children and have made the decision to allow the husband to go, while they are in their comfort zones. Their opportunity for social mobility is greatly limited in this regard, but they are connected to a familiar support system. It would seem that at the time the decision was made to commute, they also had their first children. This view can be linked to the gendered life course theory, where the timing of lives, linked lives and events contributed to their transitions on the life course. Here, the birth of the first child served as a factor not to commute, and is a transition contingent upon the wives as the primary care givers of the family. Therefore, the choice to move, coupled with the said lower standards of living in Jos, the connection to family and community and the help that would come from mothers and extended families, made the wives stay back in Jos while the husband embarked on the commute.

### **8.3 Friends**

Crow & Maclean (2004) opine that friends and neighbours are an integral part of people's everyday life even though assistance from kin tends to have a more lasting value. The participants in this study, especially the women, did not report positive help from their friends. When they mentioned friends, they did not speak about them as a helpful part in the commuting process. Bergen (2010) supports the view of the participants as she states that women commuters report less supportive messages from their support networks.

*Friends thinks it (a commuter marriage) is difficult, strange (Sratu F AC).*

*Some (friends) are for, some are against, some understand, some are [saying] not for long, let this time be that you are trying to work out how you will be together, not that this is what it's going to be (Uzo F AC).*

*For my friends, it's like how are you coping? They were telling me, why are you leaving your husband alone, you know how the world is (referring to infidelity issues) (Lumya F AC).*

*And this has affected my relationship with some of my friends, thinking I want to show them I have a job or I'm married etcetera, but it's just that I'm stretched and my husband is not around to help me, I don't have the time because I'm filling in the gaps (Michelle F AC).*

*My days are pretty routine, it's a solitary life which I actually enjoy being alone, my friends say I live like a hermit, but it's the fact of my life, my life (Ruth F AC).*

*Friends want us to be together, they ask if I know the risks, and what he is doing there, some will encourage, some will discourage you (Praise F AC).*

The reports above could lead to lack of trust in friends and the couple in question. In Chapter 5 (section 5.4.3), some participants reported being lonely and not wanting to go to places alone, also in the context of not having friends who really understood their situation. It seems that friends who will not judge them and think that their marriages are not solid enough are scarce. Most commuter couples are socially isolated and are treated as married singles, unable to form independent relationships separate from their spouses (Gerstel & Gross 1983, Holmes 2004).

A good reason for this could be that their friends are not in a commuting relationship and so do not know how to relate to them. Michelle, states that her friends feel like she wants to show off and she also hates going places alone. Praise also talks (chapter 5) about going places alone, this may be an indication that their friends do not fully understand their marital circumstances. Others also say that friends ask them how they cope and see their commuting experience as strange.

Those friends and family that do not understand, and are against not giving their validation to the commuter marriage, could make those in a commuter marriage second-guess themselves, making them wonder if they are doing the right thing. This could also alienate them from their circle of friends as they may be seen as doing something abnormal. This further establishes the earlier point made that commuter couples still view their marriages as traditional in nature.



## 8.4 Employers' Support

Ayree (2005) notes that supervisor and co-worker support is an informal source of reducing work-family conflict. Some offices have various policies such as leave, flexible work hours or arrangements for paid maternity and sick leave that are especially helpful to commuter couples. In this research examples of both work related and non-work related sources in helping participants relieve the stress of working has been found.

*It's a new and unfamiliar terrain for me and I have not been able to get used to it. Sometimes I get to work after 8 am which is supposed to be my resumption time. I don't want to ever clash with my boss because of my timing. My attitude towards work even changed when I was transferred to Onitsha, when I was in Asaba, I could go to work at any time and come at any time, but in Onitsha, I stay in the office till time to close. My colleagues understood, when I resumed late for work due to traffic and that helps. When I was in Asaba, I saw others do it, they are used to it because they were born there but I am new to the place, the people, the attitude, my attitude towards work changed and I stay in the office and make sure I do my work so that I don't clash with my madam (his boss)... My boss is kind and very helpful, and I have colleagues who are helping me work on my transfer, they are really helpful... this my coming is off record, my madam organized it for me, because, it is a long distance I have to plan it. I usually come once in two months (Emmanuel M AC).*

Emmanuel reflects on the support he received on several levels in the work place. He was able to adjust to the time of resumption even when he was in a new territory because he had a helpful and understanding boss and colleagues. His being late to work was as a result of traffic on the road during rush hour, which could range from one to three hours. His boss being considerate towards him made him change his attitude towards work and he emphasised not wanting to clash with his “madam” which implies he never wants the boss to call him to her office on account of his being late or any related work misdemeanour.

He also mentions his boss giving him time off, the wife may not know the said boss because this is a network specific to the husband. In like manner, the colleagues and friends who help wives in the office, when the husband is away may never have a friendly relationship with the husband. Lee (2015) posits that the support and consideration of co-workers and supervisors can help a

great deal in helping women deal with the emotional upheavals that come from having their husbands away from them. This goes further to reiterate Widmer's (2004) typology about spouses having different levels of support.

*I found a way of always stealing out to come and stay a week or two, usually more than the approved leave. Because of the situation in Maiduguri (referring to the Boko Haram insurgency in Northern Nigeria)<sup>14</sup>, they (colleagues) understood with me (Samson M AC).*

Samson works at a university where the Boko Haram sect is very active and loss of lives and property are rampant. Maiduguri is also very far from Jos so he values the help of colleagues who allow him take the needed time off to balance work and family.

*I don't have a driver (her place of work is quite a distance from town, it's almost an hour's drive as it is two LGA's away from Jos) I got a driver but he didn't last long...Thankfully, I got favour from my boss who allows me do my school runs (Chizo F EC).*

Chizo's boss' consideration of her need to do school runs is supportive. Her schedule is such that she needs to leave the office well before closing time as her closing time and the children's school closing time overlap. Her office is about an hour's drive from Jos city. This means that once she drops the children at school, she is off to work and needs to leave the office at about 2.45pm to get to pick the children up at about 3.45pm. Her boss recognizes that she has this parental responsibility and that her efforts to get a driver did not work out.

*I was late for this interview because I went to the headquarters to seek a transfer and they are saying I am the head of the department and the work that has been assigned to me requires me to be here, but I am trying to convince them that I can do it better from Lagos and get more customers...Also, before the civil service helps families who are apart by helping make transfers easy but now it seems they are only interested in the output and not the personal lives of their staff. Like I have asked for a transfer, but they don't see the need (Henry M AC).*

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<sup>14</sup>This was referred to in chapter 5.

Not all bosses are kind as in the case of Emmanuel and Chizo, Henry has issues with his bosses not facilitating his move. He believes that this shows how the civil service in Nigeria has changed, family consideration used to take priority. The inability of the civil service to uphold their honour towards family values has been referred to in the public spheres by other civil servants, although, there is no written proof of this claim. Clearly the leeway given to parents by employers plays a huge role in the commuter couples' ability to cope with their situation.

### **8.5 Domestic Help**

Participants reported on domestic help received from hired workers. Obtaining the services of domestic workers is a choice most families make to help out with cleaning the home and taking care of as many domestic chores as possible. With the extended family, many families had distant relatives to help with these chores, but with industrialization and societal changes, getting paid domestic workers who are not related to you became the norm. Different families employ a variety of staff to meet their needs, some employ domestic workers during the day who resume work at a certain time and close at a certain time during the day, some employ live-in domestic workers. Their preference in age of the employee is also their prerogative. Some prefer older women as nannies, some take on younger girls with the aim of also training them through school or acquiring a skill such as computer basics, sewing or catering that could help them in their lives later after they stop working as a domestic worker.

Plang (2014, 2016) maintains that there are three categories of domestic workers in Nigeria namely: the live-in domestic worker who lives in the employer's home and is available during long and imprecise work days; the live-out or day workers who live in own home and resume work at given times; the third is the daily or hourly contract jobs which is preferred by workers who have children. In Nigeria, the most common are the live-in and the day workers who most employers prefer to be women/female. These women, mostly do cleaning and laundry. The domestic workers may be relatives of employers or not and they usually have low educational levels and are also low-income earners. These workers may be remunerated in cash or in kind by paying school fees or other kinds of exchange. One of the benefits of commuting according to Gerstel & Gross (1983) is that women no longer bear the burden of housekeeping and management as this can be outsourced to employees to take up this responsibility.

*I also have a live-in nanny to help with the baby and the getting ready for work, school (Saratu F AC).*

*I have a live-in help who stays with me, but she also goes to school (the help goes to school at the polytechnic in Jos) so Monday to Friday, we leave at eight and come back at about four. So, I got someone to take care of my little boy while we are all out, she's like a sitter so the domestic chores are handled by me and help, she also helps with dropping my older daughter at school or picking her when I'm really busy (Lumya F AC).*

*I have a nanny who does not live in but comes in from eight to five and so after this time, I have to make other arrangements (Tina F EC).*

*I have two house helps...one in the morning and one live-in to help, especially with the baby (Michelle F AC).*

*I don't have a live-in nanny, but someone comes in to wash for me. The children are growing and my older daughter helps out. Once in a while my sister comes to help... I use the services (the services of a rickshaw driver to help drop the children in school) sometimes because I realise, I need to rest so I don't break down (Rebekah F EC)*

The above quotations show how a variety of paid help is obtained for different tasks related to the household and childcare. Rebekah employs the services of two types of hired help, a lady who comes to do the laundry and the services of a rickshaw driver to help her drop the children sometimes at school when she can't take them to school, especially if Simon is ill or she is tired. She also relies on her sister and daughter to help around the house on a regular basis.

*I got someone to come and do laundry for me, I clean my house myself, except[if] I have travelled for a while. I get someone to help me (Henry M AC).*

Henry is the only male participant who reported needing help with any domestic chore. He did not have a live-in help but had a constant washer man to help with his laundry.

As with almost all employment, some employments, work out and others do not, such as Ruth's experience where she states *the house helps didn't work out so much...* (Ruth F AC). Similarly, Uzo is dreading going home to be with her paid help as she is not sure how it will work out.

*My paid help hasn't come yet... I dread going back to my house where I know it's just me and her, even when there is a house help, it's not just the same (as family)... (Uzo F AC)*

There have been instances where house helps did more harm than good in taking care of children, such as stealing, child abuse and kidnapping, negligence and so forth as shown by one such report on the Sahara Reporters online news platform (2015). There have also been great stories and oral reports of house helps who have worked for years without incidence and are considered by their employers to be part of the family. There are also oral reports of employers who did not keep their part of the contract and were horrible to their staff with complaints such as sexual harassment, beatings, humiliation and lack of payment of wages. The contract that is entered into between the employer and employee is meant to prevent such negative experiences.

## **8.6 Religious Practices**

Religion features prominently in the portrait of Nigerian life. Religious commitments and values are strongly embedded in the lives of individuals and families as a whole, irrespective of the denomination they belong to. Religion encapsulates the personal faith individuals subscribe to. Schmidt (2005) identifies three dimensions of religiosity to include personal faith where individuals have their beliefs or personal experience and intense devotion outside of organized religion, participation in organized religious activities such as attending religious services and identification with a particular religious community. Participants in this study speak about their faith in a personal way and act these faith practices in their lives in such a way that it informs their way of life. They carry their faith with them everywhere they go.

Faith goes a long way in determining joy and peace of mind and in giving firm hope that the things that are beyond the grasp and control of participants will be taken care of by God<sup>15</sup>, whom they put their confidence in. As such, they pray for the baby in the womb to form well and for safe delivery, for journey mercies on precarious roads, for safety and deliverance in crisis prone areas, for help through tough and difficult days, for financial and material provision, for help in speedily bringing the commute to an end, for perfect healing for their children who are ill and the list goes on. They pray believing that their prayers will be answered. This further affirms their emotional wellbeing as the stress these issues bring are taken to God in prayer. The benefits of this are far reaching.

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<sup>15</sup>All participants in this study are Christians.

### 8.6.1 Prayer

Prayer and believe in God, to handle situations they ordinarily cannot handle was employed by participants. Examples include praying for journey mercies on the unsafe Nigerian roads characterized by potholes, armed robbers, trigger happy military and paramilitary officers, and safety in unsafe environments (like one of the men who works in Maiduguri, the headquarters of the dreaded Boko Haram sect). When participants mention prayer, they do not mention it flippantly, but with a sense of awe in the reality that God (through prayer) is able to help them and bring a difference to the situation they find themselves in. In this way, spirituality serves as a social support mechanism because as Schmidt (2005) notes, religion is beneficial to people in that religious communities provide succour for people particularly in times of stress. A personal relationship with God through faith practices, such as prayer, is able to give feelings of confidence, thereby “promoting a sense of security that is psychologically and physiologically beneficial” (Schmidt 2005:305).

Prayer was also mentioned often in the time diaries with participants spending time in prayers at specific times including morning prayers and church activities. Krymis (2011) and Chatters, Nguyen & Taylor (2014) opine that spiritual services lead to wellbeing; religious beliefs and practices are used to manage stressful circumstances and are essential to physical and mental health.

*For him, he doesn't like where he is so bringing someone there, doesn't arise, so you are praying, Lord take me out of here, he is praying that this is not a permanent stop for me as long as he is praying that, then you know (Uzo F AC).*

Uzo talks about prayer in confidence, she believes that prayers will positively help their situation as a commuter couple. She states that as long as her husband is praying that his station in Aba is not a permanent stop for them coupled with the fact that he does not like the place and would not want to bring his wife there, then that could bring an end to the commuting aspect of their relationship. It could also lead to another place where he could ask his family to relocate to if the conditions are favourable to their needs.

*Now that I'm pregnant, I need him around, but he has not even stayed one week and he's off. He is not around to pray with me and even lay hands on my tummy, I pray alone (Linda F AC).*

Linda expresses her dismay at the fact that her husband is not around to lay hands on her tummy in prayers for their baby developing and for safe delivery for her.

*I pray it will end soon... I know it's not a religious thing, but prayer helps (Lumya F AC).*

On ending the commute and being helped in her day-to-day activities and her marriage, Lumya employs prayer with the belief that God will see her through her endeavours. She also advocates prayer to commuter couples to see them through this time in their lives.

*We don't hope to commute forever, there will be periods when I have flexibility as a politician and you pray there will be times, your business grows well enough to give you time to be away and use your time the way it suits you... Ultimately you can do your rat race, but it's God who blesses, I know it's not a Christian survey but it depends on your motivation and principles, as Christians, we believe God supplies and by whatever means He decides (Isaac F AC).*

Isaac employs personal faith in the confidence that God will provide and that it is not always about the efforts you put in but the help of God.

*Even our flow together, even our spiritual and prayer lives, we can't do these things together and it slows things down...sometimes, I even cry about it and take it to God in prayer(Michelle F AC).*

Michelle explains that when she is overwhelmed by all the running around and the juggling of activities and she feels tired, she resorts to prayer knowing like the other participants who mention prayer, that she can draw strength from God and receive help and grace in this situation.

Although prayer can be communal, shared by people, most references to prayer in this research are individual acts. Church activities, however, always imply communal events.

### **8.6.2 Attending Church Activities**

*In Abuja he hardly attends prayer meetings and all. He used to talk about being involved in one church, but I don't hear him mention it again so I push him... I pray that God will help me with them... I'm just thankful for everything... God's grace was available and I was coping even though he was not around... but I'm doing well. I leave it to God(Rebekah F EC)*

Participating in a religious activity is important for Rebekah, she wants her husband to attend church activities because she feels it shows their devotion to God and also, he can meet with people he can pray with and be accountable to. In doing so, he may find like-minded companions there so that he does not have to be lonely.

Several of the female participants indicated attending midweek services during the week when they filled in their time diaries while Uzo specifically mentioned a leaders' meeting and Dinah attended choir practice.

Chatters et al (2014) describe religious activities as multidimensional to include denomination, attendance and devotional behaviours, further stating that the ideals of spiritual activities to be protective of suicidal ideation and attempts as well as depression and also counterbalances the influence of stressors on personal wellbeing. The authors highlight the benefits of church-based social support networks that include direct aid and services such as help during illness, socio-emotional support, companionship, prayer and cognitive aid, including advice and information. These benefits could be the reason why Rebekah wants her husband to be involved in church and why the participants report that they attend church activities during the week. Religious coping mechanisms reduce stress and worry, giving a boost to individuals handling various life challenges. They emphasize that church based social support is a good indicator of life satisfaction and indirectly causes more people to be optimistic about their lives as they see this as being closer to God.

## **8.7 Conclusion**

As commuter couples in Jos negotiate the social networks available to them as well as distance themselves from those who do not understand the transitions they are going through, it is noted that these negotiations involve not just anyone but those individuals who are linked to them significantly over the life course. As a result of the merging of these significant lives with the commuter couples, commuter families realise that each life affects the next over their life course trajectory.

The family support commuter women in this study receive has been perceived as pertinent for the couples to receive the boost to continue their commuter trajectory. This is particularly noted where members of the extended family show their support to commuter couples by lending a hand to commuter couples, especially in times that they feel overwhelmed with child care and



domestic care. This aid from family members helps commuter couples feel better about their commuting trajectory as family members understand what they are going through and do not judge or show bias towards them as their non-commuting friends have. This shows how commuter marriage couples compare their marriages with traditional couples who live together.

The socio-economic reality of the Nigerian state is evident in the nuclear family in many ways. This makes the couples receive support from every relevant linked life. In the case of employers, the ability to come home at unscheduled times and stay for longer than anticipated also takes into consideration bad roads and the cost of travel as well as the distances covered and other factors, to give commuter couples more time together.

Changes in household structure have also made it necessary for commuter couples to employ paid domestic workers. These workers are employed to help make running of household smooth by doing whatever household duties were required of them. The real need for domestic workers in the dual earner household is due to the fact that the income the wife contributes in the home is needed and not a luxury therefore, she needs the domestic help to make transitions between home and work smooth. In this regard, a gendered life course is examined as women are more likely to need to domestic help in order to fulfil all their roles. Domestic workers will fill the gaps in helping women accomplish their care giving and homemaker roles. The support network men and women employed also seemed to be gendered in assessment. The men seemed to appreciate their employers / work support more while women seemed to appreciate the domestic help more.

Domestic workers are also helpful in the home as certain household tasks that could be done at intervals need to be done more frequently due to inadequate infrastructure. For example, if every household was equipped with a washing machine and iron with adequate power supply, laundering of clothes will not take so much time and energy to accomplish and a domestic worker to help in that area may not be so crucial.

Personal faith upholds couples in trying times and times of uncertainty as couples pray to God to help them through their commuter trajectory. Faith is taken hold off as agency over the life course as it serves as a motivational force with opportunities for expectations that things will be better, the commute will soon end, children will be better and everyday life will be bearable.

With personal faith, commuter couples in Jos are able to shape their existence and use the resource available to them (including faith in God), to have optimistic outcomes in their lives.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **FATHERS AND CHILDREN IN THE COMMUTER FAMILY**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

Chapter 8 investigated the social support networks of commuter couples. In this chapter, the relationship of fathers and children in the commuter family as well as their views and perceptions are described. Father practices were explored as well as the roles of mothers in aiding the father-child(ren) relationship. The findings come from narratives from the parents during interviews.

The presentations regarding children, are the parents perspectives of their children's views and feelings during the commuter experience. This may be different from what the children actually think or feel. No children were interviewed in this study .

Most of the participants in the study were women, Jos being the primary home of residence of most of the commuters in this study. As a result, mothers mostly spoke what fathers and children said and felt concerning their relationship, as they were away from each other for an extended period of time. This time away serves as a significant turning point in the life course of the family, as the events during this time will go ahead to shape the later relationships of parents and their children.

Of the four fathers who were interviewed, two were around on leave and were interviewed with their wives. One of the other men, was working in Jos while his family was in Lagos (this is where their primary home of residence is located) and was earnestly seeking a transfer to Lagos. The last man was around on recess from his place of work making it possible for me to interview him at the time. I had interviewed his wife earlier in the study. I did not interview any children in this study.

#### **9.2 Perceptions of Fathers on Fatherhood Practices**

Smith (2015) interviewed a group of Nigerian men and derived the following as characteristics of Nigerian fathers: an emphasis on investment in children's education, their ability to be fathers gives them an elevated status in society, they pass good moral values to their children and must

provide adequately for their families. He further states that “the vast majority of Nigerian men take being a father to be the most important aspect of being a man” (Smith, 2015, p.333). Being a father here implies a commitment to the values mentioned above. These listed values, form the premise and underlying assumptions for the discussions in this chapter.

Glutzer&Federlein (2007) note pertinently that commitment to family life is the single most important aspect of commuting and that being a commuter parent does not signal an abdication of child rearing responsibilities for the commuter spouse, rather, commuting requires a thoughtful and continuously developing reconfiguration of engaged parenting. Fathers are expected to be around as much as possible and have planned visits and flexibility to be able to function as fathers. Such arrangements and father practices are examined in the subsequent sections.

### **9.2.1 Perceptions on Coping and Bonding of Children and Fathers**

Some of the adjusting couples interviewed were just starting their families and becoming parents for the first time (see chapter 4). Their narratives on how they have coped with being new parents and how their spouses have coped and/ or aided with the bonding of new-born babies and children is examined below. The parents also explain what fathers feel about the impact of their spending time or not spending time with their children:

*She (the baby) doesn't know [the] difference, so she doesn't really complain. Maybe when she realizes that daddy is supposed to live with us, under the same roof, she'll change, but for now...she's coping very well (Saratu F AC).*

*She's coping, she's too young to miss daddy... Her dad though is missing her.... I guess he feels like, he's missing out on the littlethings...he feels like he's missing out and he's also always saying, she doesn't know me, doesn't know me (Uzo F AC).*

According to Saratu and Uzo their babies are too young to miss their dad. Saratu feels that as the baby gets older, she will be able to discern that her father is not around consistently (Saratu's daughter's development and her bonding with her dad is documented in section 9.3).

*Funny enough, she really knows her dad, when she is crying or I am trying to feed her and he is around, she goes towards her daddy to carry her, that's the rescue point(Praise F AC).*

*She knows her dad, so the weekend he comes, I'm free, everything is him, if she wakes up from sleep she comes to him when he is around, if I put the phone on speaker for her to speak with him, she will be smiling and laughing (Natalie F AC).*

Mothers of young babies such as Natalie and Praise talk about how their children respond to their fathers when they are around. This may have to do with the current developmental stage of the baby (their babies were older than Uzo's at the time of interview). It is important to them that their children bond with their dads so that the children know their dad and the family unit is preserved. These glimpses of their children responding to the knowledge that their dads are around or on the phone is very important to these mothers as it helps them maintain the notion and practice of a close and loving family.

### **9.2.2 Perceptions on Discipline, Special Things and Special Times**

The themes of discipline and special times are discussed together because they were mostly reported by parents under the same instances, seeing that most of the recounted interactions are based on time spent together. Their descriptions also narrate how fathers feel bad, guilty or worried about not being with their children on a more regular basis and how this might affect the children.

Richter (2006) notes that discipline, enforcing rules and setting boundaries are seen as the traditional roles of fathers. Even though discipline seems harsh, it is associated with children being raised according to accepted norms and close relationships with parents. Fathers, do not necessarily need to be motivated to undertake their fatherly duties. They are however, sometimes constrained by the nature of their jobs, cultural inhibitions in society and even places of work; as well as various policies that may make fatherhood practices impossible (Browne 2015).

*I think it's been difficult for him (her husband) to cope, I see it in his emotions, actions and sometimes I hear him tell the kids, don't worry, I'll soon get another job and be with you. He was worried about how I will cope with issues of discipline and all that... During the earlier weekends when he came, it was a happy weekend, but now the kids are getting older and I see him discipline during the weekends he is around. I now see a balance between the happy family thing and the discipline. He is gradually getting at fifty percent. Initially it used to be a happy family weekend, he would scold me for spanking the kids or*

*shouting, but now I see that even the one-and-a-half year old is getting a spanking (Lumya F AC).*

Lumya talks about discipline from her husband's point of view, she feels that initially he was not firm with the children and even faulted her for spanking them but now he is taking his stand and enforcing discipline. The spanking she refers to here is not regarded as harmful or abusive, but aimed to correct the child and show disapproval of bad behaviour as deemed fit by the parents. In Nigeria it is culturally acceptable for a parent to spank a child, in a bid to correct a child that has done something wrong and deter the child from repeating it. Under the patriarchal system which is exhibited in Nigeria, men are usually assumed to mete out discipline, and usually the father to his child. This is accepted most times as proper child upbringing.(Asinyabola 2005; Olutayo & Omobowale 2006; Tunde-Ayinmode & Adegunloye 2011). There is however a very fine line between spanking for correction and child abuse which is often times crossed by those in authority over the children (Nduka, Mansor & Talib, 2012).

Fatherhood must be practiced in every sense of the word to make it meaningful to those involved. Men who take their father roles seriously are highly appreciated in the Nigerian culture. In Nigeria, when women talk in a degrading and derogatory manner about their estranged husbands or partners, especially when they are not performing their expected father duties or are not actively involved in the lives of their children, they refer to them as their 'sperm donors' or the 'progenitor' of their children indicating a very secondary role in the lives of their children, alienating these men from the very practice of fatherhood. The following excerpts paint a picture of the level of father involvement regarding the fathers in this study.

*When my wife was pregnant with our first child and even during the child's development, I wish I was there during the developmental period and I was not getting second hand information. I was always taking pictures because I felt I was missing a lot and she was the first child. For the second child, she was born during a strike and it was a long strike, I didn't think I missed that much (Samson M AC).*

*When I come, I do the school runs 'cos my job now gives me recess time and public holidays as I work in the national assembly. At times like this, it's me and my daughter, I enjoy her company, she talks like me. It's hard, you don't want to spend your time working and not know your kids, they need to be able to feel comfortable, talk to you and*

*tell you what is going on with them... sometimes I think of putting off the career to be at home and watch my children grow... It's been hard but I think we are able to balance it (Isaac M AC).*

*But we try to be fully involved in our children. I don't like the fact that my son especially is only with my wife, I feel like he should have some manly/ masculine influence... My wife is doing an excellent job, but there are some certain things I want to do with my son, I want to impart in him, like prayer and discipline so let's hurry and be together...I'm not sure what is going on in his mind, so I don't know how he behaves when I am not around, but when my wife calls that our son wants to speak to me, I look forward to it, it means he is missing me, sometimes I call and want to talk to him, we talk on the phone a lot [but sometimes] he is playing and doesn't want to talk to me. I know he is just growing and maybe by the time, he can talk well, we'll be together... I always buy gifts for our son, I ask him what he wants, he does not feel left out like daddy is there doing his thing and he says 'daddy' when I have given him the gift and when he says that, it's like 'daddy, you are the man, you did it' (Emmanuel M AC).*

Emmanuel is glad at his son's response to the gifts, to Emmanuel, it signifies a mark of approval. Browning (2005) speaks to Emmanuel's desire of teaching his son to pray and in essence start his journey of personal faith, asserting that these values instilled in children are able to build them up and make them better citizens for society. Bringing up strong citizens for society can be achieved by good education and income, but in families that are not affluent and well educated, a spiritual stand can help a great deal and sometimes surpass good education and high income.

*For daddies, they are so passionate about their children... he is very particular about the children, making sure they are asleep under mosquito nets, well covered by blankets in the cold and things like that, but I don't have time for that and so many other things... Their dada will call them, sit them down and make them understand why he is disciplining them and why he is doing it this way and not that... he would always insist that we come and he loves travelling. When he was in Bauchi, he would come Thursday evening and leave on Monday morning so it was like he was virtually with them during that period, but when he went to Niger, it was irregular... but when he can't be with*

*them, he always calls to bridge the gap, but he will always say he wants to be with them(Paula F AC).*

*When he is around, we try to have quality time with the children as a family, go to some spots, and explain to them why daddy has to be away, to help them understand daddy loves them, but cannot be there all the time...I think he feels the separation sometimes because he says things like I wish I could come this weekend but I have things to do, can I speak to my children? It's almost like routine now, so before the day ends he tries to connect with the children. We all agree this arrangement is not normal, so we all try to help(Tina F EC).*

The interview with fathers in particular, focuses on the realization that not all fathers are committed to their roles as fathers or husbands. The frequency of activities and visits show that the fathers in this study are committed to their families. The gamut of activities ranges from wanting their children to be confident and not feel the absence of their fathers in a negative way. The activities include phone calls to connect with the family, ensuring children are disciplined in a way that makes them better people; providing what they need; teaching them right from wrong; planning outings with the children and drives to school where children talk to fathers.

Recent comments on Nigerian fatherhood find that fathers are expected to be available, responsible and interact with their family members provide for the family as well as assert his moral authority (Ayinmode & Adegunloye 2011; Okoroafor & Njoku 2012; Uyanga & Effiong 2017). Browne (2015) corroborates, saying that the basic feature of fatherhood is his relationship with his children. Fathers and commuter fathers especially are more involved at weekends because they are less constrained by work activities. The more time men spend at work, the less time and opportunity they have to spend taking care of children (Hook & Wolfe 2012). As fathers engage in particular activities with their families and spends time with them, their influence and presence are felt. The more time a father has to spend with his family, the more likely he is to spend it in caring for them (Richter 2006), and spending time with the children. Time spent with fathers is one of the ways children interpret how their fathers love them. These are attributes of fathers that have been idealised and children have been socialized to accept this and expect from their fathers (Richter & Smith 2006; Leinaweaver 2015; Smith 2015). Children expect their fathers to love them and spend time with them.



Leinaweaver (2015) and Richter (2006) argue that fathers are an important resource in the upbringing of children. This resource becomes even more pronounced when fathers take on their provider role. This role is played out in long distant fathers when they provide by sending money home to their families, a transaction that portrays the father as a caring and involved father not as a father who wants to buy away his daddy duties. This is true in comparison with the fathers in this narrative.

Due to socio-economic reasons, they cannot be there as at when needed, but they are seen as good providers from a distance when they cater to the needs of the family, as a matter of fact the motive behind the commute is to better provide for their families. An example of this from the narratives is when Henry says the house rents are due at the same time and he paid the rent of his family in Lagos first and asked his landlord in Jos to give him some time to come up with his own.

### **9.3 Children's Reactions to Fathers' Absence**

Children in commuting families do perceive that their lives and circumstances are somewhat different from that of their friends and neighbours, but mostly, they are confused as to why their fathers are not present as their mothers are, especially when they are at a young age. Glotzer&Federlein (2007) assert that children get anxious when they are not certain of their father's schedules and the timing of visits. How children react to the absence of their fathers and what they do and say when their fathers are around or out of town is the focus of this section.

#### **9.3.1 Children Missing Dad**

*Sometimes it affects them physically...when I'm going back they cry and that affects me too. Sometimes I leave the house before they wake, so that I don't see them go through that. I try to sneak out before they wake up(Samson M AC).*

*Our son is so close to his dad, once in a while, he asks where is my dad? Initially, when my husband is travelling back, he'll ask me to bath him while he leaves, but we decided it was better he knew his dad was travelling so that the questions will reduce... some evenings he will hear the gate open and say his dad is back (Linda F AC).*

*Yesterday, I called them and my son said, 'come to this house now', that's his way of expressing he is missing me. I had to tell him that I would go for a wedding and see them, I was not planning to go for the wedding but now, I will go (Henry M AC).*

Henry will go for a wedding he did not plan to attend, in order, to fulfil his son's desire to see him. This speaks of commitment to his role as a father. The amount of unbudgeted resources this trip will cost is another factor worth considering.

*They ask when is daddy coming, I want daddy to take me to school today, but then he is not there... they [are] already able to count the weekends he will be around and he tries to come every weekend, but when he doesn't make it the next weekend, they ask me why he is not coming. Sometimes the older kid will get depressed and I hand the phone over to him and daddy explains why he is not coming (Michelle F AC).*

These children are young and their way of showing the way they miss their parents has some action to it such as speaking out in Henry's case, checking who is at the gate in Emmanuel and Linda's case and Michelle's son is always counting down the days to the next visit. Samson's daughters cry and he has to sneak away. Below older children's reactions are highlighted.

### **9.3.2 Children Growing up 'Independent' of Dad**

*The children have been well adjusted considering the circumstances... children don't demand so much as they are grown...my husband has not really been a part of their lives but they coped and the (other) side of that is that their relationship with their dad is a little stilted and they are not too free with each other. My son is serving (doing his NYSC<sup>16</sup>) in Lagos right now, where his dad is and they are ironing out the friction, but that is where we find ourselves... he's missed so much of the children's milestones, and somethings he doesn't know because he hasn't been with them. I think he realized that a bit late, so now he is trying to make up... and I think once you've missed those years, they are gone but for the grace of God it's hard. I don't think the absence of their dad has affected my son badly but my daughter is fiercely and scarily independent. She doesn't think she needs anyone as long as her mum is there, she doesn't think she needs anybody*

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<sup>16</sup>National Youth Service Corp is a compulsory one-year programme for Nigerian graduates upon completion of their first degree. It gives the students an opportunity to know more about their country while gaining work experience at the place of primary assignment.

*and I don't want here to go through this and have this mind-set that this is normal, in a way its good because I'm not so scared of her dealing with life but on the other hand, I don't want her to become too hard. Her relationship with her dad is not too great because he wants her to come for holidays but she's always in a hurry to come back to Jos and he feels rejected, it's a vicious circle, she's growing but it's a consequence of the choices he made... but the kids are already use to him not being there, he feels very bad, he would like to have a father-daughter, father-son deep conversation but they just sit there twiddling their thumbs going 'mhhm'... I didn't really have anything to do with it, but I guess I could include me because, if I really wanted to, I could have packed my bags and gone (Ruth F EC).*

As Ruth considers the outcome of the relationship of her children with their dad as a result of his being away, she feels the situation could have been different. She is of the opinion, the father/children relationship would have turned out much better than it is now if she had packed her bags and gone to Lagos with her husband at the beginning. This implies that there must be a balance between work and family and families must work on the feedback they receive from each other to improve family relationships. In the case of this family, we can learn to give and take, it would have helped if the husband understood his wife's worry that the material possessions did not matter as much as he was bent on giving, that the family being together was more important. For the wife, if she had packed up her belongings and left earlier in the marriage to join her husband, the relationship may not have broken down this much.

Where Ruth gives the differences in the behaviour of her son and daughter, she asserts that her daughter is scarily independent. This statement has some gender undertone as parents in Nigeria are said to raise their male and female children differently, with boys being independent and self reliant, not needing anyone and girls being brought up to depend on others for what they want (Uyanga & Effiong 2017). Girls are usually stereotyped and expected to behave like girls to be 'soft', obedient and unassertive.(Akintayo 2010;Makama2013). The negative effect of this in girls, could later begin to feel unable to express themselves, do what they want to and feel oppressed and dominated by the men who have always learnt to have what they want. As society changes, gender equality is being clamoured for which will create a level playing ground for all gender (Makama 2013).

### 9.3.3 Telephone Conversations

Telephone calls are mentioned here briefly to emphasise the role of the telephone in the commuter family as it affects children. The use of telephones generally in the commuter family has been discussed extensively in chapter 7. The phone aids the relationship between fathers and children as the children also talk to their fathers on the phone receiving fatherly care over the phone such as advice, asking if they are behaving well, and asking when the fathers will be coming home. The phone serves as a means of interchanging relationships, the children showing affection and the fathers being fathers from a distance. Many of the fathers in the narratives call their children on a regular basis. This is consistent with the findings by Lam & Yoeh (2015) and Leinaweaver (2015) suggesting that calling children is somehow seen as being there and keep abreast of what is happening at the lives of the children. The reports below, buttress this point.

*They ask what about daddy, we talk on the phone and when he comes back, it's not like it's a stranger because we talk on the phone and they know him (Dinah F AC).*

*Once one of my kids asked why dad is away all the time and I asked him to explain (on the phone) (Tina F EC).*

*On their missing me or me missing out on their lives, it's just because I'm not physically there, most of the time, we are on the phone and they tell me everything about what happened in school so I don't think the disconnect is much. Most of my jobs are in Lagos so we see quite often and I stay longer when I'm working there (Henry M AC).*

*He has called several times today asking about Simon because he is not feeling fine...The children know their father and always look forward to his coming. They talk on the phone and they always ask him, "when are you coming?" (Rebekah F EC).*

*Now she asks about wanting to come to Abuja when we talk (Isaac M AC).*

Isaac was interviewed more than a year after interviewing his wife, by this time, the daughter had grown and started talking, which is different from the time his wife declared that their daughter 'doesn't know difference, so she doesn't really complain. Maybe when she realizes that daddy is supposed to live with us, under the same roof, she'll change, but for now...she's coping very well. So, just as the mother thought would happen did happen, the daughter is telling the dad, she

wants to go to Abuja. She most likely associates Abuja with daddy and wants to be there so she can be with daddy.

#### **9.3.4 Children Accommodating Dad**

*The first few days are easy days, everyone is hugging me, then a few days later, they acclimatize and start being naughty. They always wake up early the next day after I come back, it's as if they want to be sure I'm still around... my daughter seems to sleep with me on her mind, immediately she wakes up, she turns to my side (Samson M AC).*

*The children always ask where is their daddy, but gradually, they have gotten used to it. Funny enough, when daddy lands, it's like mummy is forgotten, it's a plus for me because I get to put my head down (Lumya F AC).*

*When he is not around they feel the impact, because they always talk about wanting to see him, asking when he is coming and things like that... the children will always bond with him somehow, they didn't make him feel like he was a stranger (Paula F EC).*

*Bonding with the children is necessary as well. You know I have boys when he comes, there is a distance (between the children and father) for a while but after a while, they start, going towards him, and I don't like it they might not notice it, but I'm a woman and I notice it immediately and I don't like it, it takes a while for them to start again and then it's over just as they are warming up and getting into him then, he goes again (Chizo F EC).*

Children react in various ways to fathers not being around as reports in this section showed. Due to the constant absence of their fathers, some children just love it when dad shows up and are outright accommodating. They put on their best behaviour as Samson says of his daughters and then go back to being themselves. Lumya's children welcome daddy and give mummy a chance to put her feet up because all the attention is turned towards dad. Paula says of her children that their dad is not a stranger to them, whereas, Chizo is concerned that there is a distance and no immediate bond between the children and their dad when her husband comes.

Chizo and Ruth's children who are older, in their teens and young adults, seem to be more withdrawn in their relationship with their dad while the younger children are more verbal and active in their relationship with their dad. The younger children say exactly what they want to

happen. Their actions can most times be interpreted regarding their relationship with their dads. Children are physically attached to dads and have a social awareness that fathers need to be around more often.

Okoro & Njoku (2012) are of the opinion that when children are left to themselves, or seem not to bond with their parents, or seem to be seen as displaying certain traits of independence, such children could find themselves influenced negatively by peer pressure or social media, with such traits as materialism and individualism being displayed in the children. The sad result of this will be the erosion of our cultural values as a nation.

Sayer, Bianchi & Robinson (2004) identify that certain behavioural and compositional factors such as single parenting, maternal employment and father's employment, which can be assumed to be found in a commuting relationship, serve as depressants to childcare time. This assumption then portrays that children in commuting homes are missing a certain portion of adequate parenting as both parents are not available at the same time for the most part.

Engel, Beardshaw, & Loftin (2006) and Richter (2006) highlight that it is not just the presence of a father in the household that makes a difference, the nature of that relationship is equally important. Good and positive relationships have been linked with aspects such as quality educational attainment, low criminal behaviour and low substance abuse, better protection for the children both physically and emotionally.

#### **9.4 What Mothers Do to Aid the Father-child Relationship**

The relationship between fathers and children in commuter families and how mothers enhance the relationship is examined in this section. Glotzer&Federlein (2007) note that commutes are hard on children, pressing one parent into a "super parent role" while the other parent struggles to make their parenting real to their children. The examination of narratives shows how mothers cope when the fathers are not around in the handling of questions, discipline of children, as well as their fears, triumphs and practices in a bid to maintain a seamless family relationship.

##### **9.4.1 Bonding, Questions and Other Views**

The narratives of new mothers and older mothers in what they do to help their children not become estranged to their fathers is discussed below.

*I'm like well, don't be saying she doesn't know me, just be holding her and make the most, this time (Uzo F AC).*

This is Uzo's response to her husband when her husband told her he thought their then new-born daughter does not know him. She, a new mother herself, told him to keep holding her and make the most out of the weekend he was around.

*Mine is a little baby but I always make sure anytime her dad comes, they are together and we spend family time/ bonding time, so that when she is wiser and he comes, she won't say mummy, one uncle is around (Praise F AC).*

Praise, another new mother, talks about how she strives to make her husband comfortable with the baby so that she recognizes him as her father and not a stranger.

*I went through some emotional stuff as a child growing up without my dad and I don't want my kids to go through that, so I encourage them to talk to him and I try to make that absence not to be felt (Dinah F AC).*

Dinah draws on her negative experiences as a child whose dad was a military officer and was not around his family often, to make sure her children do not feel the absence of their dad by encouraging them to talk to him. The use of telephone calls in aiding relationships has been discussed in the previous chapter as well as this chapter. Subsequent narratives also draw on using the telephone as one of the coping strategies mothers use to aid the relationship between fathers and children in commuter families.

*(When my son calls) I would tell him, your dad is just an hour away, call him, but the first instinct is mummy (Ruth F EC).*

Ruth advises their son to call his dad and build the relationship that is already on a shaky foundation, she also asserts that her daughter does not think she needs her dad. This friction arises as the marital relationship between Ruth and her husband was adversely affected due to the time spent apart, this also affected the children, making the relationship with the dad challenging. Ruth's story is documented in previous chapters.

*But when my wife calls that our son wants to speak to me (Emmanuel M AC).*

Emmanuel indicates that his wife makes the call to him on behalf of their son and she does not deny him speaking to his dad and she also explains the situation to their son

*I always explain to him where his dad is...I tell him, your dad is in Asaba, working (Linda F AC).*

*Where I am raising the boys alone, where I have boys, there is a limit to which I can control them, but boys and their fathers, there is a kind of respect they give him. There is a role a father plays in the lives of his sons, I'm really missing that, sometimes, I feel like I'm losing control. When they know you are present they behave, but when they know you talk and you are far away, their response is different, they will answer you on the phone with respect and still do what they want to do(Chizo F EC).*

Chizo's concern is that she is not raising her boys properly and that they are lacking proper guidance and she is not able to connect to them at a certain level because she is the mother and not the father. Lee (2015) identifies with Chizo's situation, in that she asserts that commuter wives are effectively single mums and they face some of the same issues single mum's face such as disciplining the children and the stress involved in taking care of and catering to the needs of children at different ages and development stages.

*When they continue like that, I give them the phone to talk to him themselves and then they can ask all their questions... and there are times he comes and they are all around me asking me to do this and that and I say go to daddy, so I can rest but I say maybe it's because they are used to me(Michelle F AC).*

Michelle also encourages her children and husband to form their bond over the phone and encourages them to spend time together when her husband comes for the weekend. This however, she says does not work out as planned because when they want something done, they revert to mum. She thinks that this happens because they are used to being with her.

Ruth (see preceding section) makes the same claim as Michelle where the children seem to come to the mother to solve their issues even when their father is around. This phenomenon may be because the children are used to being with their mother and getting her to meet their needs when they needed it most of the time and their father was not there. Lee (2015) and Rabe (2001) assert that when fathers are away from their children for a long time, it could lead to a lukewarm attitude, the children may not want to be around them when they come home. Those fathers who persist and draw their children near may help the mothers greatly.



*Personally, if I was not under a bond, I would be willing to leave my job and take my kids to their father. I am tired of my children asking me why can't daddy be home all the time, even after the father has tried to explain to them, obviously, the explanation has not sunk in yet so (Tina F EC).*

Regarding the questions her younger children ask (she has two teenaged children and two younger children), Tina even considers leaving her job so the children can be with their father. She is considering this because it seems the explanations she is giving her children about their dad's frequent absence is not being properly assimilated by them.

Some of the mothers say they tell the children their fathers are working, they do this to manage the expectations of their children and help them realise their fathers are doing a good job. The children also talk to their fathers on the phone receiving fatherly care over the phone such as advice, asking if they are behaving well, and asking when they will be coming home. The phone serves as a means of managing relationships where the children show affection and the father's father from where they are. The negative effects of lack of closeness with fathers who found it difficult to spend time with his family is examined in Ruth's explanation. Chizo also expresses some concerns.

#### **9.4.2 Mother's Hidden Thoughts**

*The kids come back and say why can't dad drop or pick us from school? So so, and so's dad brought them to school. I hate those moments when they have to yearn for their dad and they tell me. In those moments, I sometimes tell myself, be grateful he is even around (Michelle F AC).*

Michelle voices her thoughts on how she truly feels when her children are longing for their dad and they express how they miss having him do certain things with them such as dropping them in school. She exclaims that at those moments, she hates the fact that their dad is not around, but yet she is grateful she is not a widow or a single mother.

This thinking recorded by Michelle may not be peculiar to her alone. This thought may have crossed mothers' minds at one time or another, but they did not voice it out during the interviews. In Nigeria, being a widow is associated with pain and hardship as fatherless children forego many necessities of life because they have no provider and the socio-economic situations

are not usually favourable for a single income earner to cater for a family. Being a single mother is highly stigmatized and children raised in single households have much to be desired most of the time as their fate is probably worse than being raised in a fatherless household where the mother is a widow. In some female-headed households, poverty is very high as children are not able to eat properly, clothing is scarce, paying of school fees and affordability of other school resources is also dire and housing and living conditions can also be terrible (see Levant, 1995; Popenoe, 1998; Rabe, 2016).

Casper & Bianchi (2002) suggest that father absence could be associated with negative consequences, such as children becoming societal deviants and an increase in child poverty. Father absence due to being in a commuter family may however have different consequences. For example, children in commuting families are not at risk of child poverty as commuter families occurs to provide better access to resources. Rabe (2016) opines that an absent father who is absent due to work does not make him unloving or uncaring towards his family as he is likely to be economically present by making the family better off financially by the resources he makes available to the home. Commuter family mothers with this understanding, have a sense of gratitude that there is a father who is available, then do all in their power to make the relationship for all family members seamless and meaningful.

### **9.5 What I Learnt From My Father**

Two of the men who were interviewed reflected on their relationships with their own fathers and how that relationship had impacted on their relationship with their children now. Their views are discussed below.

Yoshida (2012:468) noted that the nature of men's relationships with their fathers is expected to have an impact on men's involvement with their children as biological fathers invest more in their children due to biological ties or because their role is more institutionalized compared with, for instance, fathers in remarriage or cohabitation.

*They disciplined us even if I'll say it's to the extreme, flogging (beating and discipline, see explanation in section 9.2.2) us and so on, now I can't be that extreme to my kids, but I believe in good discipline of children... even though, they were there, they were not fully involved, somethings they left us to our devises, but we try to be fully involved in our children (Emmanuel M AC).*

*When I think back, my dad was involved... My dad on the other hand was a terrible businessman and politician, but a wonderful dad, a very sound and passionate dad towards his children. I didn't think so then but when I look back, I realise his passion towards his children and I pick that...which is why when I come, I do the school runs (Isaac).*

The two major lessons Emmanuel and Isaac learnt were in the area of disciplining their children and being involved in their children's lives. Emmanuel reports that his parents were there, but not involved and took the disciplinary measures to the extreme. Richter (2006) buttresses Emmanuel's experience stating that just as there are benefits of fathers being involved, there are also costs, such involvement such as domestic violence including child abuse. From Emmanuel's childhood experience, he has learnt that being a dad and being involved as a dad does not necessarily involve harsh measures, but that he can be a dad that passes the message and values by being involved, by teaching, by talking and by example.

Isaac favours being passionate towards his children, an act he remembers from how his dad raised them. He reports that even though his dad was not successful financially and in his marriage, he will turn the negative aspects from his father's life into positive ones for his life to make him a better dad.

During the interviews many of the participants indicated that their parents were with them during their childhood years. This may be a model they have assumed works best for parenting. Therefore, when they have to leave home due to work commitments and not be there all the time to be a father, to provide security and guidance for the family, it is possible they feel a sense of loss, conflict and guilt for being torn away from the active day-to-day engagement in the household and in the lives of their children.

Hosking (2006) states that working fathers who have embraced their father role are torn between the desire to be seen as good workers and also good fathers who are there for their children. Depending on the job a father has, many find that their work takes them far from their families for long hours. Debates in the workplace and the desire for men to be more active in the lives of their families has led to certain policies being formulated such as paternity leave and some companies offering father incentives to include parenting workshops, telecommuting and partial work from home.

## 9.6 Conclusion

The findings obtained from time diaries and what parents say about their care and involvement with their children show that mothers are more involved in child caring activities among commuter couples. This is not surprising since the mothers and children are in the primary home, but gendered constructions of parenting were also clearly enacted.

Commuter fathers indicate that they would love to spend more time with their children and instil in them certain values that they find pertinent to their way of life and how they would like their family to be structured and identified, this desire is however not possible due to work commitments. Fathers therefore make good use of home visit times and the phone to be totally involved in their children's lives.

Some mothers identify the fact that the fathers need help to realise this dream of fostering a certain environment for their children, such as feeling loved, confident, disciplined and well cared for. The mothers play a major part by helping the fathers recognise potential areas that fathers need to step in, and close that gap by either meting out the disciplinary measures themselves or calling the fathers to speak to their children or explaining to the children why their dads are not there at that time. Certain female participants relate how they try to create a conducive atmosphere for fathers to relate with their children, knowing that if the father-child-relationship is not properly managed at a certain age, the relationship may be turbulent in later years or perhaps even lost.

It would seem that fathers in this study are willing to do their best as parents, in line with the dictates of their religious views as well as the Nigerian society which encourages men to practice fatherhood in a certain way. Issues of time and the work-life balance when talking about fathers in the developmental stage of their children as playmates, coaches or disciplinarians also has an impact on the transitions of fathers in their life course as they are not physically available most of the time the children are growing up.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **10.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a brief examination of the answered research questions and the findings gathered. A short description of the theory undergirding the study is presented. The limitations of the study are reported as well as the contributions to knowledge the study has provided. Another highlight of this chapter is the perceptive and rich recommendations it delivers to commuter couples as well as suggestions for further research.

#### **10.2 Theoretical Foundations**

The study used the Life Course theory as the theoretical perspective for this study. The life course theory is described as the individual's movement through various socially created transitions during the course of their life within a specific context (Giddens & Sutton 2014). This definition makes it apt for this study on commuter couples (discussed in detail in chapter 2).

An understanding of the life course implies that transitions, such as taking a new job or relocating to a new town, results in a change for the individual and/or family. Transitions in one life stage can influence transitions in another stage. For the commuting family, the transition involves being a family that stays continually together, for a couple of individuals who have to stay apart and navigate doing things alone. For instance, the commuting men in this study do not like having to cook for themselves while the wives sometimes feel they are single mothers, performing the roles of father and mother at the same time.

Transitions within the life course are also embedded in time, as the timing of events and family stages has an impact on how the individuals change or experience changes. Before becoming a commuter couple, couples imagine that being separated as a family is best done during the early stage of marriage where the consequences will be minimal, giving them a chance to live continuously at the later stage of their marriage. Time is also considered in this transition as couples typically do not expect the commuting relationship to extend more than a couple of years (usually between three to five years). Timing of the commuter relationship is considered

important as it affects many areas of family life, including relationships with children. For instance, Ruth and her husband were not able to end the commuter relationship within a short time. This resulted in an estranged relationship between the father and his children.

Another feature of the life course theory that make it adaptable to this study is its emphasis on human agency and personal control. Human agency connotes individuals make personal choices about events that will alter their lives. These choices are not usually made thoughtless, when commuter couples in this study make a choice together concerning the commute and the impact it will have on the family, they usually make choices they have a certain measure of control over. For instance, they may decide to make the primary home of residence Jos, seeing the children are settled in school and there is a good family support system. Other measures of control they exhibit could be in the frequency of visits.

A key component of the gendered life-course theme which was also highlighted in the study was that of linked lives as individuals' life paths are played out in tandem with the life courses of spouses/ children, friends, and co-workers. In fact, Moen (2001) posits that some of the most innovative research on gender and the life course is investigating married couples' conjoint experiences, such as studies documenting the linked, but also gendered, aspects of couples' decision making and gendered domains of shared roles. This study on commuter couples investigated the themes highlighted by Moen (2001) and applied the finding in related chapters on gender roles in a dual earner home and the social support employed by couples.

### **10.3 A Synopsis of Research Findings**

The findings of the research are presented in the subsequent sections. These findings were collected from data analysed from the semi structured interviews held with participants in 2016, one focus group interview and time diaries participants completed after the interviews were conducted in a bid to answer research questions. The data were analysed into themes and those themes formed the chapters already presented. The synopsis of findings are hereby presented.

#### **10.3.1 The Commuter Marriage Trajectory**

How does commuting affect couples in a commuter marriage? Findings from Chapter 5 and 6 sought to answer this question and show how couples in the study decided on their commuter trajectory mainly because they desire a better socio-economic setting for the family. The

reflections by couples on their commuting history express the view that the commuting arrangement is costly. This cost is not only financial, but also involves social and personal development costs. The commuter arrangement is decided upon at a particular time, usually during the early stages of the marriage because couples envisage that by the later part of their marriage they would be together, having achieved the economic goal of embarking on a commuter marriage. The timing of the onset of the commuting event is a definite turning point in their life course as a couple.

The gendered experiences in this study were noticeable as wives highlighted that they did not have to deal with the daily rigours of cooking an elaborate meal for their husbands. Husbands on the otherhand were glad to be focused solely on work during the time they were away from home. Most importantly, it was taken for granted that it was perfectly normal for fathers to be away from the primary home in pursuit of work while the mothers satyed with the children in the home, this is embedded in the partriachal structure of the Nigerian society. Disadvantages of being in a commuter marriage in Jos included poor eating habits for the men and dangerous transport options. Commuter couples find that family and friends sometimes have ambivalent or negative thoughts towards their commuter journey. They receive a lot of advice from their family, urging them not to be content in a commuter marriage and find a way to quickly bring the shuttling to an end.

Ending the commute is a huge aspiration for the couples. Before embarking on the commuter relationship and in the early stages, they had a time limit apportioned. Established couples, commenting in hindsight urge younger couples to not only think about ending the journey, but have a very concrete arrangement and follow the agreed plan. They warn that if this is not done, the commuter marriage may span for longer than expected with unintended consequences such as estrangement between a father and his children. It is not clear what exactly will happen at the end of the commuter journey, but it will serve as a turning point in the couples commuting history, as they may not pick up in their relationship where they left off before the commuter marriage started.

### **10.3.2 Finances in a Commuter Marriage**

Commuter couples interviewed in Jos, further answer how a commuter relationship affects them as they find themselves in a situation that could be likened to double taxation when it comes to

financial expenses. They narrate that they spend money on two house rents, paying twice for daily living expenses among other necessary expenses such as travelling back home, for the men, and phone calls. Negative consequences of this dual spending prompt the couples to bring the commuting relationship to a quick end. Couples also look for ways to build their own houses in order to avoid paying house rent, especially in the location of the primary home of residence.

Husbands and wives have differing opinions when it comes to how they view their spending. It is established that men take care of big fixed expenses such as rent and school fees, while the women handle the day-to-day spending and smaller financial items. The women state that these seemingly small contributions, including children's everyday wants and needs, really add up to large sums of money. Commenting about who feels the financial pressures of a commuter marriage more, women said both parties feel some pressure. In a commuter marriage however, due to their extra spending, women find that in managing the resources, they end up overstretching themselves and sometimes even borrowing money to make ends meet so as not to overburden their husbands. Both parties appreciate their partners for playing their expected roles with regard to finances. The emphasis on men being financial providers for their families and hence also controlling most of the money, whilst women manage the money (Pahl 2000; Burgoyne et al 2006) were clearly seen in this study, further emphasizing the patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society.

### **10.3.3 The Practice of Marriage**

What are the coping strategies employed by commuter couples in Jos? In answering this question, commuter couples interviewed, report how they cope (solve problems and adapt to situations) by means of communication. One of such ways is to communicate using the phone to aid their relationships. Due to busy work schedules, sometimes the phone call may not serve its purpose as calls come in at times that are not convenient for the other person. Couples talk about how they 'negotiate' a phone call knowing the times to call or not, seeking to consult on pressing issues. Examined themes also suggest that couples get frustrated when phone calls do not achieve the aim of connecting the couples. The couples are under no illusion that phone calls can replace face-to-face interaction. With this realization, couples look forward to bonding and reconnecting. Some couples, however complain that the bonding process after a long separation is difficult at first. This time spent apart, does not help the growth process of the marriage as



issues that should have been discussed and resolved are left undone. Commuter couples in Jos understand that time spent together is an essential commodity in working out their marriages. This understanding, prompts them to strive towards doing special activities and deliberate acts for their partners during their time together. These partner practices go a long way in encouraging the bonding process for the couple.

Commuter couples generally view their marriage as a traditional marriage but find themselves engaged in roles that are not considered gender traditional roles. Partners get involved in role reversals with women doing more of what their husbands would normally do if they were at home and vice versa. Couples indicate that they have had to cope with this arrangement and women sometimes feel that it is unfair that they take up responsibilities that are not originally theirs. This is as they also care for the children, manage the home and resources and also contribute financially to the household. Women describe themselves as being both the man and the woman in the relationship. Over the gendered life course, this sagaciousness is described as a structural lag, which are the gaps identified between present day realities and outdated expectations and rules around priorities and pathways of individual men and women on the life course. However, it was also noted in the study that when the couple is together, they are more likely to fall back into gendered role expectations where the women cook elaborate meals and men fix things around the house.

Commuter couples in Jos have very clear expectations of the commuting spouse, i.e. the husband. It is expected that he should lend a helping hand to the house chores, seeing he is not always around to pitch in and will not be around for a long time. A bigger expectation of the couple is that the man be the main financial provider and that the wife be supportive and should encourage her husband so that they can achieve their goals. This expectation is non-negotiable from both parties. Women are thus mainly responsible for children and house chores men are 'helping' women in this task. The same is true for earning money, men are responsible for earning money and women are 'helping' in this regard. In this way, there is a reversal in traditional gender roles albeit in a partial way.

#### **10.3.4 Commuter Couples and their Support Networks**

Continuing to answer the question on the coping strategies employed by commuter couples in Jos, commuter couples identified four positive support networks available to them. These

networks include the family, work (employers and office policies), domestic workers and religion. A last network, friends, was identified as outright negative, as friends did not understand the couples' commuter trajectory. Their inability to comprehend the commuter couple's journey puts a strain on their relationship.

Commuter couples report that their greatest support system constitutes of their family members, they show the most understanding to their situation and are enthusiastic to help at any time. This was especially the case for women who had their extended families in Jos.

Employers, bosses and colleagues showed sympathy to the commuters and were eager to help them achieve a work and family balance by giving concessions on school pick up time and extended leave periods. Some employers, however were not so considerate, making the commuting process laborious. Domestic workers likewise helped the couples at various times by helping out with household chores, thereby reducing the burden of housekeeping.

Personal faith was considered a prominent determinant of peace of mind. The features of personal faith, such as answered prayers and the hope their anxieties, concerns and worries are taken care of by God whom they put their confidence in. Another attribute of personal faith was the ability to meet with other people at religious activities, which brings satisfaction and possible further support to couples.

Over the life course of commuter couples in Jos, the social environment and historical timing commuter couples find themselves in, determine the kind of support they subscribe to and appreciate. For the men, they appreciated bosses who gave them time off with considerations for travel costs and unsafe roads among other socio-economic factors. Women considered it necessary to hire domestic help to help them achieve their gender roles at home as well as work outside the home. Some of the challenges experienced in Nigeria, such as erratic power supply, meant that the importance of paid help in the house (for example, to help with the washing) became more prominent. The agency of personal faith was adapted as a motivation for a confident life.

#### **10.3.5 Fathers and Children in the Commuting Family**

Four fathers participated in this study and were able to express their thoughts about what they perceive of their children's reaction to their absence. The other thoughts about fathers and

children in a commuter home were garnered from mothers who are mostly at home with the children.

The fathers in this study are generally passionate about their fatherly roles and feel torn and have conflicting feelings when they have to balance work and family, with the feeling that the family is at the receiving end of the deal.

Commuter fathers of infant children felt that their children were growing up without them and may grow up not knowing them. This fear and other fears were abated by encouraging mothers who helped to aid the relationship between children and fathers by giving helpful suggestions and making phone calls to fathers on the children's behalf. Mothers support the father-child relationship by portraying the job fathers are doing as a good thing for the family and not as a means to abandon the family.

When fathers are around on visits, they do a lot to make the visit time count including talking, driving the children to school and bringing gifts. One participant lamented how her husband missed the opportunity to build a solid relationship with his children when they were growing up, stating that now that they are teenagers, their relationship with their father is strained. She admits she may have saved the situation, if she packed up her things and ended the commuting relationship when the children were younger. It is pertinent to note that the cultural values of the Nigerian society are dependent on parents continuously passing down the right values to their children to stop the erosion of values we hold dear. These are contented for now by breakdown of the traditional family unit where both parents are working, peer pressure and social media.

#### **10.4 Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of this study is the fact that not many established couples responded. Established couples are those who have been married for more than ten years. This limitation makes it impossible to determine if commuter couples in Jos have different experiences according to the length of their marriage. In addition, the couples who responded to this study are not in any way representative of all the commuter couples in Jos and as such, the findings gathered here cannot be used to make a generalization of all commuter couples in Jos.

## **10.5 Recommendations**

How can couples engaged in commuter marriages be supported? The following recommendations propose ways in which commuter couples can be supported:

Narratives from commuter couples report they do not intend to be in a commuter marriage for a long period of time. However, they sometimes find themselves in a prolonged long-distance marriage. In order to avoid such an extended inadvertent journey, couples should have an organized plan of action that they review often, in order to ensure their plans are on track. This is important as extended periods of being away from the family could have many negative consequences. In addition to having a plan, meeting with other commuter couples and post commuter couples, in order to have a proper assessment of what a commuter marriage practically requires for the family before embarking on the job or family change may be useful and valuable.

Many of the participants in this study also said that couples have to know each other and be strong to embark on a commuter marriage. For example, one man talked about not marrying a particular woman because she was too clingy and he always knew he was not going to be domiciled in one place because of the nature of his job, he therefore needed a partner that would be independent and ready to bear the hassles of a commuting relationship. To this end, I would recommend that families considering commuting should make a full and comprehensive account of their strengths and weaknesses and the obligations and responsibilities of a commuter marriage, together with someone licensed to offer practical help and advice.

Marriage counsellors and therapists are not a visible part of the Nigerian society. They are however needed to help families work through the stresses and conflicts that may arise as the commuter relationship continues. Some couples had mentioned that bonding after times of being apart was difficult to ease into, and that some quarrels were left unresolved. Commuter families, having found themselves in this situation, strive to build strong families. Having access to good family counsellors and therapists can help preserve this desire. The call is for Nigerian therapists and counsellors to be more visible and render much needed services.

For companies who are looking to expand their operations outside their original location and may need staff who will have to leave their homes, I would recommend they hire experts in the field of marriage, family and work to conduct interviews with their potential candidates for the

new offices they want to open. This could help assess if that staff or their marriage can withstand a commuter marriage and adequately balance work and family. This would go a long way in helping potential staff give their best work performance and help the company save resources in the event the potential staff cannot cope.

It has been acknowledged that time is of the essence in commuter relationships. I would enjoin commuter families to make the time spent together meaningful and impactful by talking honestly about issues with your spouse, building lasting memories and investing quality time in growing children. It would also be gainful if working hours and holidays are harmonised in different organisations to make family holidays and work leave time streamlined to enable families spend more time together and plan vacations.

Companies and organizations are also strongly encouraged to imbibe best practices by integrating father incentives such as parenting workshops and seminars, flexible work hours where fathers can work from home for some days in the month, making use of the new technological aid available such as emails and social media. The paternity leave should be a total package for commuter fathers; it should be set up in such a way that fathers can use this time for family related events and not just when there is a birth in the family.

## **10.6 Avenues for Future Research**

This interesting study on commuter couples can be extended to a comparative study of commuter couples in different Nigerian states according to the length of their marriage. This may assist in broadening the vistas on Nigerian commuter couples. Furthermore, an investigation on commuter husbands coping strategies will give a further perspective on this topic. This idea is necessitated because this present study is mainly a female narrative as most women were in Jos, the primary home. It would also be insightful to find out if at the end of a commuter marriage, couples will revert to their “originally” assigned gendered roles after a period of adjustment.

## **10.7 Contributions of the Study**

This study has contributed to expanding the research and existing literature on contemporary African families in the area of work and family. This area of research has not been given much attention on the continent. In particular, this research has shed some light on commuter marriages

in Nigeria, which when compared to studies on commuter relationships across the world, has little or no existing literature. This study has gone into detail to examine the commuter marriage trajectory, the practice of marriage among commuter couples, the financial discourse of commuter couples, the relationship between the commuting parent and children as well as the support networks available to couples.

### **10.8 Conclusion**

Commuter couples have given us access to better understand their unique lifestyles. Commuter couples want the best for their families emotionally, financially and socially. The means available for them to achieve this is to embark on a commuter marriage. The family embarks on this journey, realizing it is a sacrifice for the entire family and not a sacrifice of the family. The hope and intent of embarking on a commuter marriage is that it will be a short event in their life long marriage. Some couples have been able to successfully end the commuting journey while some are still working on bringing the journey to an end.

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## **APPENPIX 1 - SEMI STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Semi Structured Interview**

#### **Section 1**

##### **Socio Demographic Data**

- 1 Age of respondent
- 2 Age of spouse
- 3 Length of marriage
- 4 Length/ mode/ reason for commute
- 5 No. of children and ages
- 6 Home of residence/ living arrangements e.g. in the case of where there are children involved
- 7 Educational attainment and occupation of respondent
- 8 Educational attainment and occupation of Spouse
- 9 Frequency/ intervals between visits

#### **Section 2**

##### **Discussion Guide**

- 1 what led to the commute?
- 2 How would you describe your support system (that help in coping e.g. family, house helps etc.)?
- 3 How do you cope with the children and in your opinion how have the children coped with this arrangement?
- 4 What are your views on the future of your commuter relationship?
- 5 What do you view as public perception towards this kind to of marriage?
- 6 What is your view on this marriage i.e. pro's and con's and what you like or dislike about this?
- 7 What effect has living apart had on your relationship?
- 8 How would you describe the financial implications of this type of marriage (which of you feels the pressure more and why)?
- 9 What do you do in your spare time? (in order to ascertain support and coping measures)
- 10 Challenges, recommendations, other comments?

## APPENPIX 2 - TIME DIARY

### Time Diary

Kindly fill in, in one sentence what you did in the following hours of the day. This is to help the researcher get a vivid picture of your typical day.

Initials-----

Day 1 Date-----

#### **6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

#### **1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----

6pm-----

#### **7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

8pm-----

9pm-----

10pm-----

11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 2 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----

6pm-----

**7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

8pm-----

9pm-----

10pm-----

11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 3 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----



6pm-----

**7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

8pm-----

9pm-----

10pm-----

11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 4 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

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**7pm – midnight**

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11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 5 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----

6pm-----

**7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

8pm-----

9pm-----

10pm-----

11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 6 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----

6pm-----

**7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

8pm-----

9pm-----

10pm-----

11pm-----

Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

1am-----

2am-----

3am-----

4am-----

5am-----

Day 7 Date-----

**6am – 12noon**

6am-----

7am-----

8am-----

9am-----

10am-----

11am-----

12noon-----

**1pm – 6pm**

1pm-----

2pm-----

3pm-----

4pm-----

5pm-----

6pm-----

**7pm – midnight**

7pm-----

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9pm-----

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Midnight-----

**1am – 5am**

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## **APPENPIX 3 - INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

### **Informed Consent Document**

Project Title: Going the Distance: A Description of Commuter Marriages in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

Researcher: Sahmicit Kumswa, PhD student, University of South Africa

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to be able to describe commuter marriages in Jos. I am inviting you to participate in this study because you identify yourself in a commuter marriage.

#### **How many people will participate?**

Approximately 20 people will participate in this study.

#### **How long will I be in this study?**

If you agree to take part in this study, I will conduct an interview that will last about 30 minutes. If there are any questions I have later, I might contact you to schedule another interview.

#### **What will happen during this study?**

I will ask few questions about your experience in a commuter marriage. I might ask if the interview will be recorded so I can use your exact words when reporting the study. However, I will use a pseudonym so your responses will be completely confidential.

#### **What are the Risks of this study?**

There are no foreseeable risks from being in this study.

#### **What about Confidentiality?**

I will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law and the University of South Africa. To help protect your confidentiality, your name will only be written on the consent form. Instead of using your name on the transcript of this interview, I will assign you a pseudonym. When I write a report or article about this study or share the study with data set with others, I will do so in such a way that you cannot be directly identified.

#### **Is being in this study voluntary?**

Taking part in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you do not feel comfortable answering any question, please feel free to let me know and if you have any other questions, please ask me.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

***Name & Signature of Respondent -----***

***Date-----***

Statement of Researcher

I have discussed the above points with the participant. It is my opinion that the participant understands the risks, benefits and procedures involved with their participation in this study.

***Name & Signature of Researcher-----***

***Date-----***



## APPENPIX 4 - ETHICAL CLEARANCE



### DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY HIGHER DEGREES COMMITTEE

9 October 2014

Ref: 2014\_SOC\_DHDC\_Kumswa  
Mrs S K Kumswa  
Student #: 51913771  
Staff #: 1965514

Dear Mrs S K KUMSWA,

**Name:** Mrs Sahmicit K. KUMSWA (51913771@mylife.unisa.ac.za; +2348054714352)

P O BOX 7320, JOS, NIGERIA

**Supervisor:** Prof Marlize Rabe (rabeme@unisa.ac.za; 012 429 6698)

Department of Sociology, College of Human Sciences

**Proposal:** *Going the Distance: A Description of Commuter Marriages in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria.*

**Qualification:** Doctorate (Sociology)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Higher Degrees Committee of the Department of Sociology for the above mentioned research. Final approval is hereby granted for the duration of your doctoral research work.

*The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Sociology's Higher Degrees Committee on 12 August 2014, and duly amended as per Prof Rabe's e-mail confirmation dated 1 October 2014.*

*The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:*

- 1) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.*
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Sociology's Higher Degrees Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.*



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- 3) *The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.*

*Note:*

*The reference number [top right corner of this communiqué] should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication [e.g. Webmail, E-mail messages, letters] with the intended research participants, as well as with the Department of Sociology's Higher Degrees Committee.*

Kind regards,



Dr Christopher G Thomas  
Chair of Department  
(012) 429 6560



Prof Jessica Murray  
Manager, Office for Graduate Studies  
College of Human Sciences

14/10/2014

